

VOLUME TWO OF THE HEPCATS REPRINT LIBRARY

MARTIN WAGNER

SNOWBLIND



PART ONE

INTRODUCTION BY LARRY MARDER

SNOWBLIND

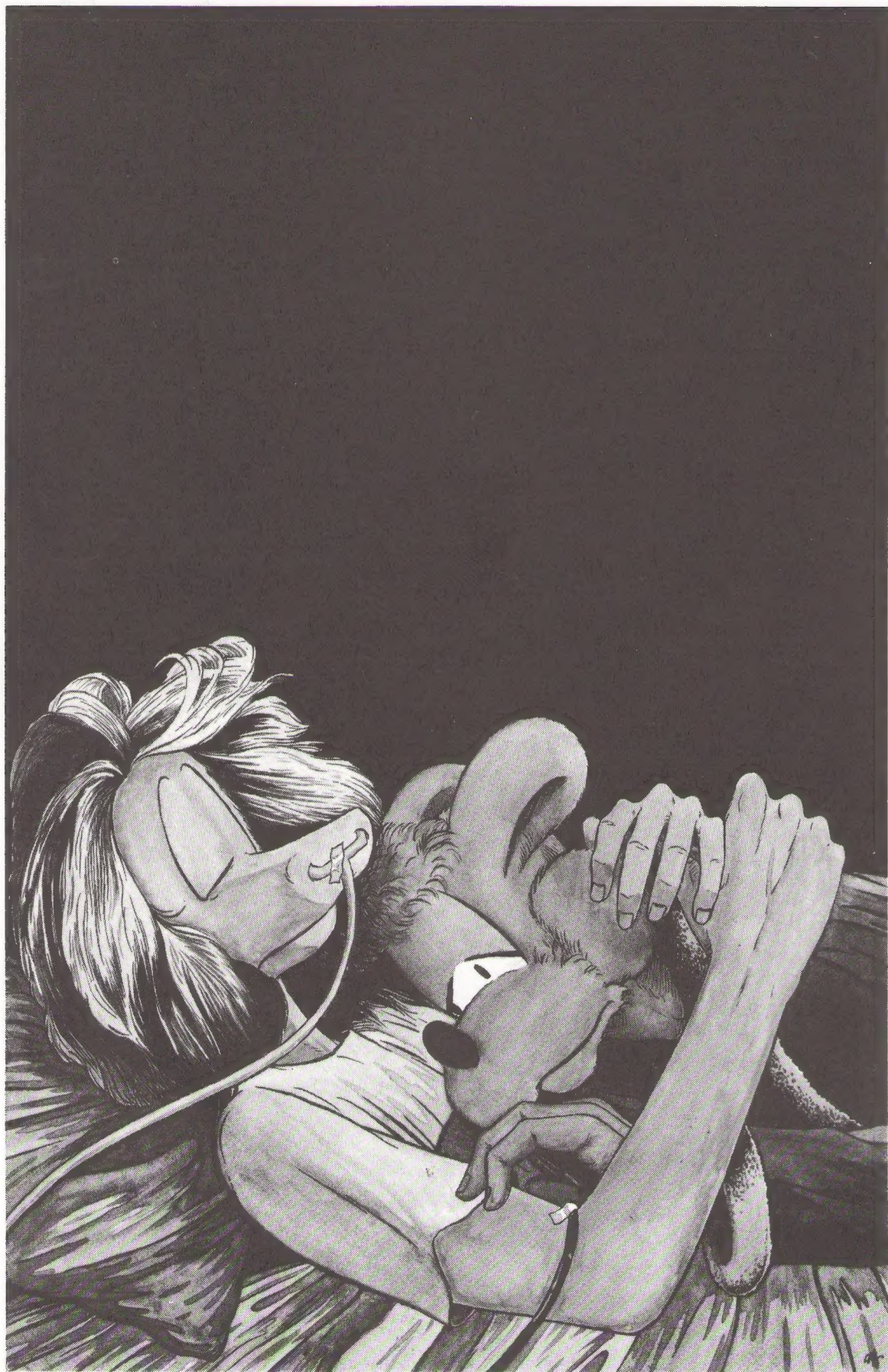
PART ONE

Yes, I have a thousand tongues,
And nine and ninety-nine lie.
Though I strive to use the one,
It will make no melody at my will,
But is dead in my mouth.

Stephen Crane

But where are the snows of yesteryear?

François Villon



MARTIN WAGNER SNOWBLIND

PART ONE



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SNOWBLIND, PART ONE

Volume 2 of the Hepcats Reprint Library

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INTRODUCTION

LARRY MARDER

Understanding the air of controversy that perpetually surrounds anthropomorphic comics has always been beyond my grasp.

Why in the world do people get so strange about the idea of humanized animals (and animalized people) but have no trouble accepting all the illogical absurdities contained in the science fiction premise of super-hero comics? Neither anthropomorphics nor super-heroes are real! Both are fictions.

Cartoonists can do anything they are first capable of imagining and then rendering in a way that is understandable to other people. The comic book (or comic strip) experience is a simple covenant made between the cartoonist and the reader: "Here's my world. Here are its rules. You either buy into my premise or you don't." Simple.

So okay, let's examine Martin Wagner's covenant with his readers presented in *Hepcats*. It's a slice-of-life yarn about a circle of slackers living in modern day Texas. It's filled with the goings on of real people doing real things. Well, not exactly real people.

They all have animal heads.

But even though we, the readers, can see that the characters have cat and horse heads, the characters don't seem to be able to make the distinction about each other.

They don't seem to know they have animal heads.

They simply have individual faces. For example, when *Hepcats* characters are speaking to each other, they say things like, "Have you seen a big guy in a tattered green ski jacket with a skinny blonde girl in a white jacket?" as opposed to "Did a rhino and a poodle recently walk by here?"

In *Hepcats*, the fact that the characters have animal heads is irrelevant except for the fact that Martin wants to draw his stories about his characters in this way. He says: "Here's the *Hepcats* world. Here are its rules. You either buy into my premise or you don't." Simple. In Martin's world the people have animal heads, but otherwise everything else is exactly like our world. Why animals? Because Martin says so. Martin is a keen observer of human nature. The adventures of Erica and company clearly and cleanly reflect Martin's own hopes, dreams, fears and joys. *Hepcats* is a personal vision with its own textures and timing.

What has always impressed me the most about Martin's work is his amazing ability to signify volume in his precise background renderings. *Hepcats* exhibits a sense of architectural space rarely seen in western comics. The malls, hospitals, and apartment complexes practically become main characters in Martin's world—a world of bold characterization, natural dialogue, and architectural depth. In Texas? Sure. If that's where the *Hepcats* live, that's where they live. That's all there is to it.

Larry Marder

May 1995

Anaheim, California

Larry Marder is the creator of Tales of the Beanworld, and is also the executive director of Image Comics.

SNOWBLIND & FROSTBITTEN

AN INTRODUCTION BY MARTIN WAGNER

I remember when I first put pen to paper with *Hepcats*.

It was the last week of May, 1987. The summer semester at U.T. was cranking up, and I was staying at the late and sadly lamented Villa Capri motel in Austin, waiting for the dorm to open up the next day. I inked the first strip that night with a 00 Rapidograph.

The Philadelphia Experiment was on HBO.

Yow.

That night while I was doodling away on those first five strips, if I had had any inkling whatsoever just how tumultuous the next eight years of my life would be, I may very well have chucked the fuckers down the commode and gone to bartending school. But I am glad I did not do that. No, really, I am. I am.

It seems that *Hepcats*—and in particular this graphic novel, which has now consumed all but two years of the series' history—has always been produced in conditions of extraordinary hardship. Unlike the huge mainstream superdude publishers, or the flavor-of-the-month alternatives, who have managed to hit the ground running and then coast along either on industry greed or good feeling, *Hepcats* has always been a cult affair, supported by a small but furiously loyal cadre of retailers and readers. I owe these people everything; it's that simple. Some folks, unable to understand exactly my situation as a self-publisher in today's fractured marketplace, and concomitantly unsympathetic to the financial and personal difficulties involved, have noisily attacked my sporadic publishing schedule and vocally defected from the fold. Well, that's their prerogative, I say. For better or worse, there is still a solid and slowly expanding readership, and I'm profoundly happy it's there. There is no formal dedication in this book, but it's for all you devotees who've stuck by *Hepcats* through thick and thin. I'm still here because of you; I'll be here in ten years, when this month's *Wizard* coverboy is forgotten, for the same reason. Bless you all.

In the introductions and supplements to *The Collegiate Hepcats*, I discussed the roots of my characters and strip itself. There's more of this wankery in *Hepcats 1—The Special Edition*, for those of you to whom the wherefores are of interest. Here I think I'll talk a little bit about how this novel came into being, because at the time it was quite a transition. I wanted to tell lengthier, dramatic stories in comics form, as I was at that time rediscovering comic books and their storytelling potential. *Cerebus*, as anyone who's been following my work for any length of time must know, was a major influence. I remember buying my first issue (#112/113), and I remember looking at Gerhard's famous rendering of the Regency Hotel on the cover of *High Society* and finding all in one fell swoop my new teacher. I was also buying the Epic graphic novels by Moebius (actually they weren't Epic graphic novels but reprints of European graphic novels done by Epic and...oh, hell, you know what I mean) and discovering another eye for detail that would be instructive. Then *Akira* burst upon America, and that was it for me. Boom. I knew where I had to be, what I had to be doing.

But I had these animal characters...

I was happy drawing them; they were fun and simple. They came about originally because I was incorporating school mascots into my comics prior to creating *Hepcats*. But in the *Hepcats*

daily strip, although comedy was the order of the day, I had made an earnest effort to create very real characters, very real people, in spite of the anthropomorphic milieu. So I decided simply to take the plunge and tell exactly the kind of story I wanted, using these characters, and let the chips fall where they may. To my surprise and relief, it has worked for my readers, though many of them probably still wonder why I do it, still wonder what species of animal Erica is despite my constant assurances that her species—or any characters'—is irrelevant. Just think of them as the characters they are supposed to be, I tell everybody, the people they are supposed to represent beneath the masks of their animal faces, and you'll understand just fine.

I created Erica about a year into the daily strip's run, and I did so because there were no prominent female characters.

I had tried a girlfriend or two for Joey until I gave up in the face of the futility of it all. Joey was simply too set in his immature ways for any girlfriend to put up with him for more than two weeks. Joey's a sweet kid, and I think of him not merely as my creation but my friend (heey, it's not all that weird; many creators do this to give themselves the sort of personal connection to their art that will make them produce the best stories possible; I still spend time at the U.T. campus soaking up the collegiate atmosphere, and often I imagine Joey and Gunther are right there hanging out with me, backpacks slung lazily over one shoulder, checkin' out the babes, trying to remember who's having a party Friday, fretting over mid-terms...). But Joey just couldn't hit the "romantic lead" vibe.

I could, however, bestow a love interest upon a new character, Arnie, who had just undergone something of a life-changing episode and was a bit more deserving of a really nice—ahem—reward.

So along came Erica. And she changed the strip, and my life, irrevocably.

At the beginning of the fall 1988 semester I published the paperback collection *Yo: The First Hepcats Book*, which is pretty much the first 75 pages of *Collegiate*, and which is now selling (if you can find one anywhere) for around 50 bones. The release was commemorated by a highly successful signing at Dragon's Lair Comics here in Austin, at which I met a guy who would become one of my best friends for the next few years. (He dropped out of sight upon the advent of marriage and fatherhood, but has recently resurfaced in my life. I have spared him nothing in the way of ridicule.)

So anyway, (I digress...do I digress?) this guy turned out to be an assistant DJ at a local tit bar. Hey, don't flinch, that's what they are, Jeez. As it turns out, I had just drawn the wacky week of strips wherein Arnie discovers to his horror that his dream girl is a "feature entertainer" at The Mountain of Venus. And this DJ guy had been showing these strips to several of the girls where he worked and, reportedly, amusing them greatly.

I was told some of them would like to meet me.

Now think of it. I'm a 22-year-old heterosexual college kid. What am I gonna do? What would you do?

So I began going to the club. And I really don't mean to sound like an ex-crack addict confessing his evil habit to an understanding, doe-eyed support group, because it really wasn't that way. I did have fun. And I do have a fondness for beautiful women, which was satisfied now more frequently than it ever had been as my pal the DJ introduced me to one dancer after another. Many of them didn't impress me much as the kind of girl I really wanted to get to know, but more of them than I expected were quite nice and friendly, simply young girls working their way through college. I made friends with one lovely creature who danced under the name of Samantha and conformed precisely to the sort of Amazonian perfection every horny college boy dreams of: nearly six feet tall and most of it legs, perfect breasts that must have cost her at least a grand apiece, deep golden tan skin and blonde tresses down to her flawlessly fat-free rear end. I met her one night when I accidentally stepped on her foot with all my weight in the DJ booth. El cruncho. She couldn't go on for two hours. Thereafter we were somehow buddies. I was told by somebody one night that she thought I was just so damned cute she wished she could put me in her pocket and carry me home. I replied that that was jim dandy with me. Naturally nothing came of it. This was, after all, real life.

Then there was Chelsea.

Chelsea's real name was Tifanie and she came from New Orleans. Actually, she came from somewhere else (one of the more redundant aspects of our imminent relationship, for me, would

be sorting the fact from the fiction in what I knew of her life), but she did start dancing on Bourbon Street at the Bourbon Burlesque Club, which is still very much there. I recently walked past it while doing location scouting for the New Orleans sequence of *Snowblind, Part Two*; it was hard to imagine I'd ever entered it, and I cannot imagine doing so again.

Anyway, somehow we hit it off like a house on fire, and the ill-fated two-year marriage that followed has been well documented in the editorial pages of my early issues. Suffice it to say that today, as I inch toward thirty, I can see the whole affair as the youthful indiscretion it was, but it had its role in my personal development, to be sure. Experience is said to be that which you get when you don't get what you want. I'm a little more sure nowadays of what I want out of life, but back then, I was not, pure and simple, and let's face it, there are some people who just won't learn to swim unless you haul them out to the middle of the Gulf of Mexico and chuck them in.

Though I've discussed much of this period of my life at length in my interview in *The Comics Journal* #173 (\$6.00 ppd. from Fantagraphics Books, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115; you're welcome, Gary), it remains for me here to mention how it brought this storyline into being.

I knew even in the daily strip days that I wanted Erica to have some kind of mystery in her past, but how to go about that was problematic. I'd dated casually through most of my school years but had had no long term monogamy thing from which to draw informed observations of a woman's character. I wanted to tell Erica's story but was still too young, green and naïve. Tifanie (and one other incident which I'll get to in a minute) provided a model, and though Erica herself is not Tifanie herself, the inspiration for Erica's past was strong.

Tifanie claimed to have been sexually abused by her father at age four. I have no positive proof this ever took place, but I had it confirmed by Tifanie's brother (a nice kid whom I still really like) that he was a violent man, a classic abusive patriarch. On the few occasions I met him he always tripped my bullshit alarms. There was something lurking behind those eyes I could neither fathom nor trust; it was unsettling, creepy.

It was also true that Tifanie's increasingly erratic behavior was entirely consistent with a history of child abuse. Often she claimed to have a twin sister (named Chelsea) living in north-east Texas, who had been treated terribly when she was a little girl. If only Tifanie could call Chelsea! This is one of the more bizarre periods of the relationship, for I knew without doubt there could be no Chelsea; no one else from Tif's family had ever mentioned her. It was dawning on me that this person was nothing but a psychologically projected persona. Weird? Can you say, "Cue *Twilight Zone* theme?"

At another point Tifanie took off for a weekend dancing jaunt in New Orleans and disappeared without trace for six weeks. I finally tracked her down to Virginia, where she had dropped in at the home of her mother's second husband and his new wife, and fawned over their small daughter (by Tif's mom) in a way that made them all feel they'd just morphed into a David Lynch movie.

I began getting intimations that the marriage just wasn't going to work.

Clearly, Erica is not as profoundly fucked up as Tifanie was. But our relationship was educational to me. Not only did I learn a thing or two about real life, it also gave me a frame of reference from which I could begin to write dramatic storylines and authentic character studies. It would be easy to be bitter about her, about anyone who'd treated you in such a hateful way, but I'm not. If anything, I recognize I wouldn't have this story.

You lose some. But you win some.

I'm running out of room here, and good old MS Word is telling me I've already cracked 2100 words, so I'll blow through the rest of this.

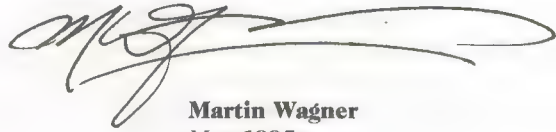
The remaining inspiration came from an incident at U.T. in which a friend of mine was kidnapped and raped in a motel room. The details are in the *Journal* interview. One of the things you have to deal with when this sort of thing happens to someone you know is the frustration; you have an unquenchable urge to rush out and promptly murder the miscreant, but you know that you simply cannot do so. Either he's in custody (he was) or he's gone, in which case everybody's as frustrated as you. And then if you killed him you'd, like, be in jail for murder, 'cos like, you killed him...

However, one thing that amazed me after the incident was the way in which my friend seemed to wear it like a badge. That is to say, she never seemed to let it break her up, but instead

wanted everyone to know that it had happened, and she had survived it, and wasn't about to let it ruin her life forever, dammit. Admirable, no doubt, but I kept wanting to say, *Whoa, hang on, hold it, don't you just want to scream, freak out, shoot someone, drive your car 100 miles an hour? No one would blame you for just letting go.* Well, I'm quite sure she did feel like doing those things, and often, perhaps. But instead, she took all that energy and tried to channel it into a positive direction. Which is better, I guess, and as I'm learning, not uncommon among rape victims. I imagine it's perhaps more intestinal fortitude than I could muster. I *can* tell you that any woman who lives through an episode of sexual abuse has more courage than any man ever thought of.

So, from these seeds grew *Snowblind*. A story of Erica, a young woman with a hidden past, a past she has run away from and must now confront and overcome.

Is this a superhero comic after all?



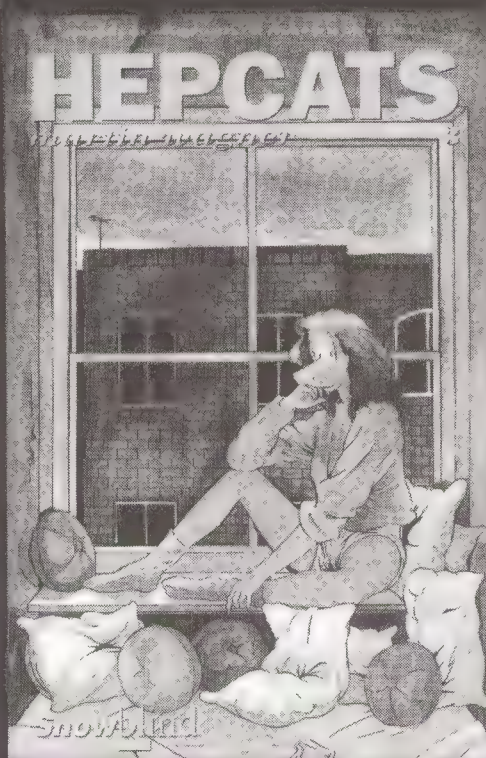
Martin Wagner
May 1995
Austin, Texas

P.S. In early advertising for this book, I announced I would be redrawing some pages I felt were flawed, and adding additional scenes. Some readers scolded me for this, and I must admit now that they were right. The temptation to revise and redo early work is an evil one that tests every artist; nothing is more embarrassing to an artist than crude early work, but often one's opinion of such work is harsh to an exaggerated degree. Upon reading the early issues serializing *Snowblind, Part One*, I found they didn't suck so bad after all, and any extra material would be self-indulgence. Sure, there are still pages that make me cringe here and there (Chapter III—ugh!), but it *is* my history, and I should be truthful to it. So here, warts and all, is the first half of *Snowblind*.

Part Two is much better. >grin<

CHAPTER I

The Pavilions of Memory



THE ONLY SUBJECT
I EVER LIKED IN SCHOOL
WAS ENGLISH.

I LIKE READING.
I READ WHATEVER I CAN
GET MY HANDS ON.

ANYWAY, I'VE NEVER FORGOTTEN SOMETHING
ONE OF MY TEACHERS SAID ONCE. IT WOULD'VE
BEEN 10th GRADE 'CAUSE THAT'S WHEN
I RAN AWAY.

SHE SAID ANY GOOD STORY
HAD TO HAVE THREE THINGS
NO MATTER WHAT: A BEGINNING,
A MIDDLE AND AN END.

BUT NOT NECESSARILY
IN THAT ORDER...

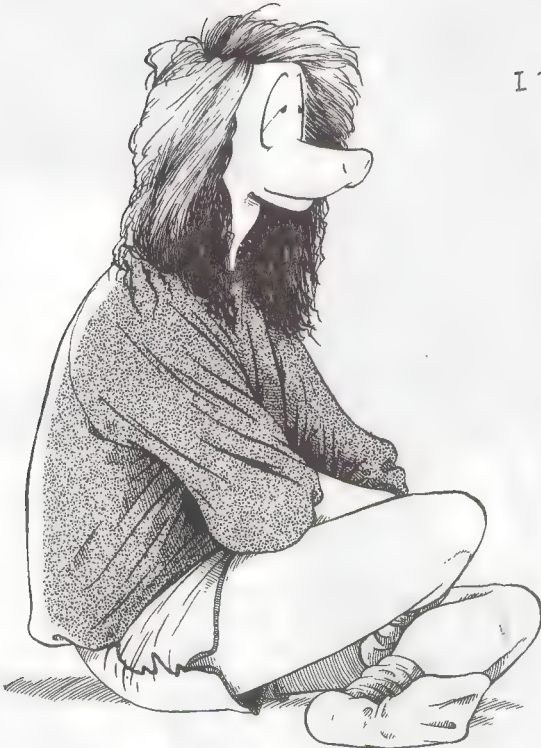
I THOUGHT THAT WAS PRETTY WEIRD.

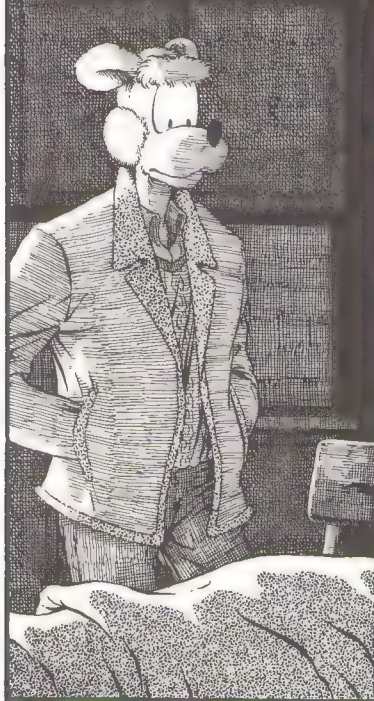
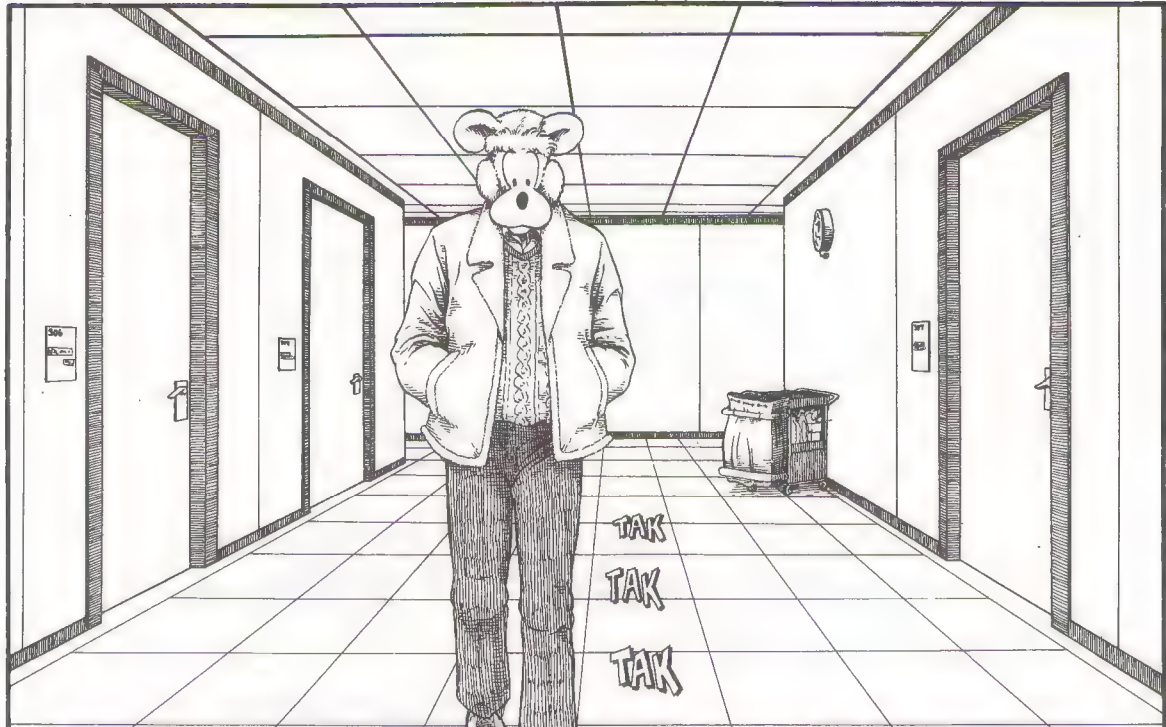
BUT IT MAKES A LOT MORE SENSE NOW.

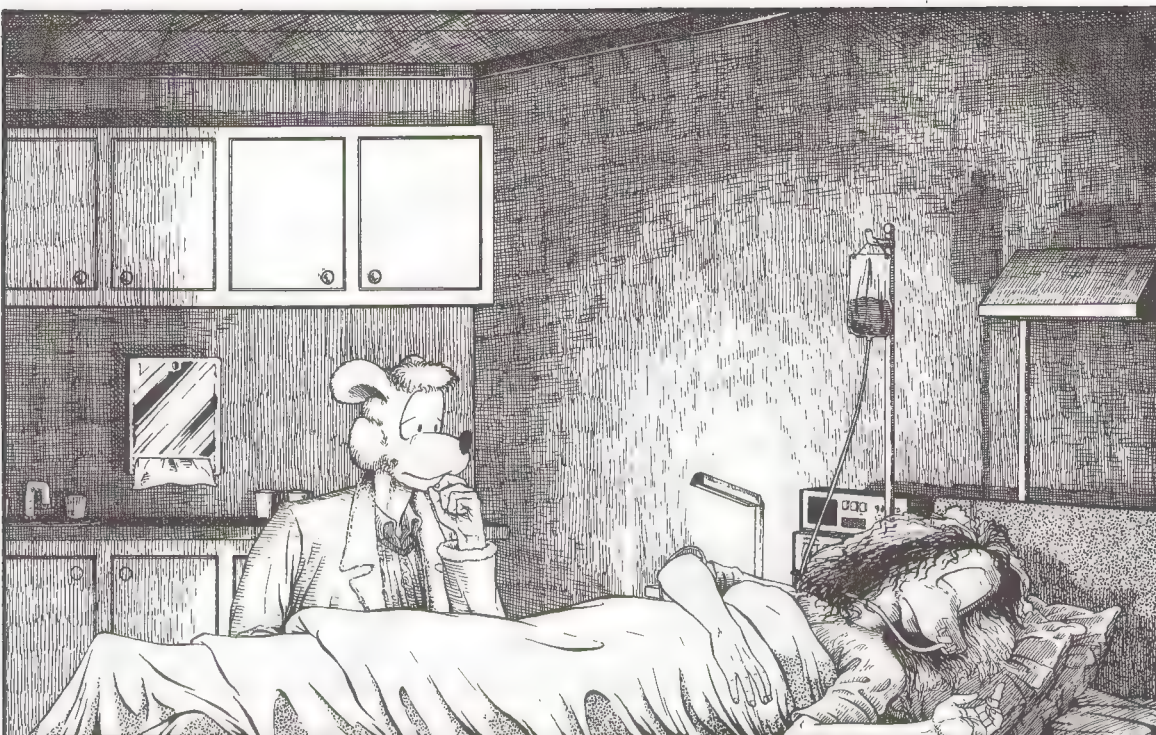
I MEAN, WHEN I THINK ABOUT
THE WAY MY LIFE HAS GONE, IF
I START AT THE BEGINNING,
IT JUST GETS ALL CONFUSED.

SO IF I WANT
TO UNDERSTAND
ANY OF IT...

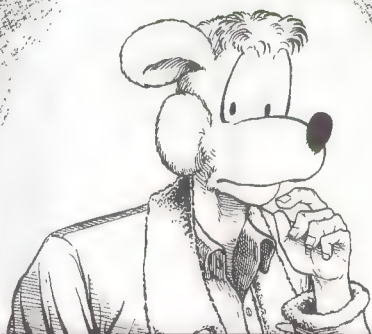
...I GUESS I'LL
HAVE TO START WITH
WHAT'S HAPPENING
NOW.





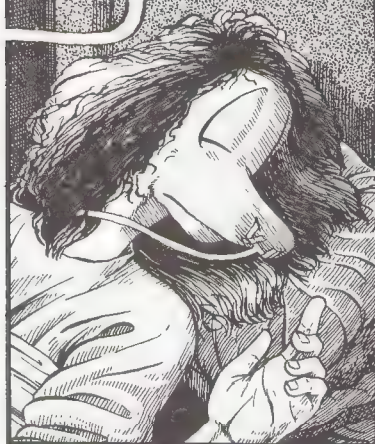


ARNIE...



OH, HI, DOC.

ARNIE, I NEED
TO TALK TO YOU
OUTSIDE.



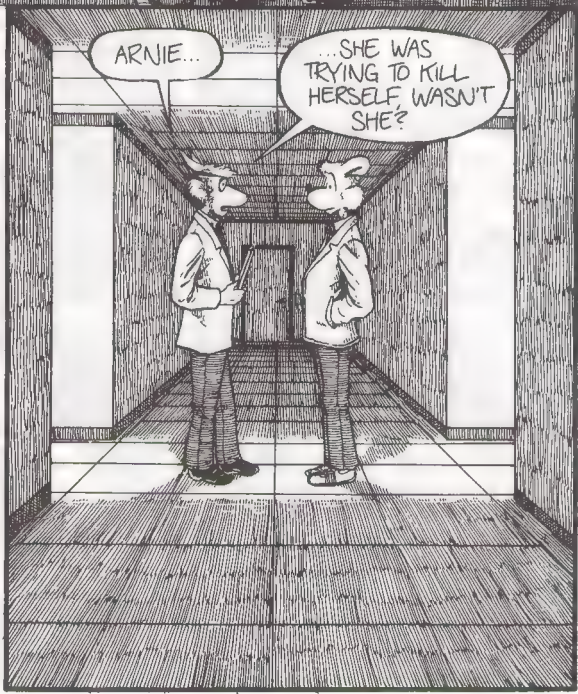
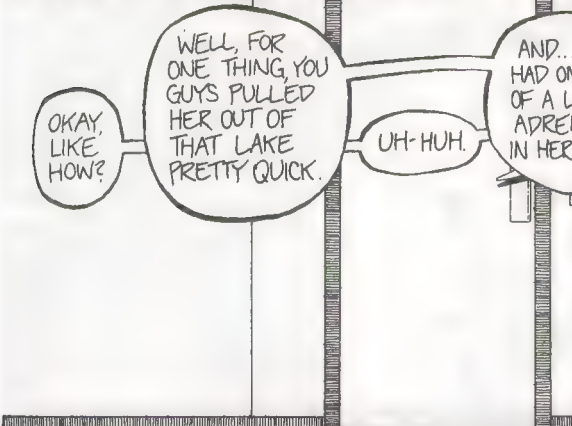
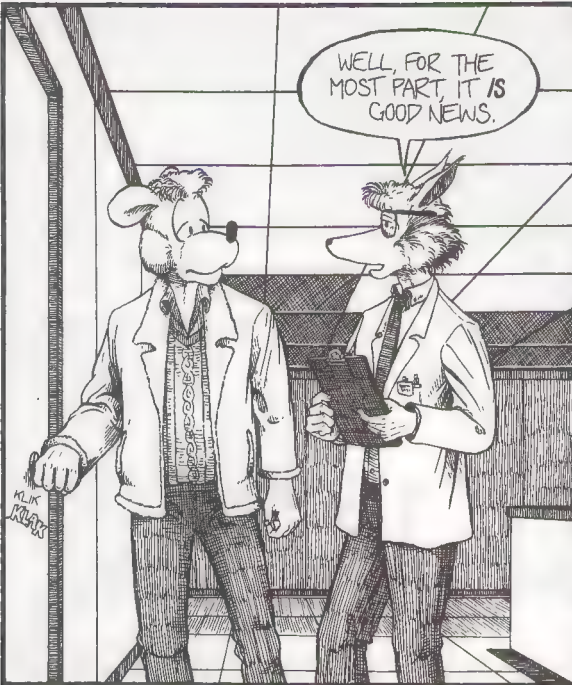
OH...

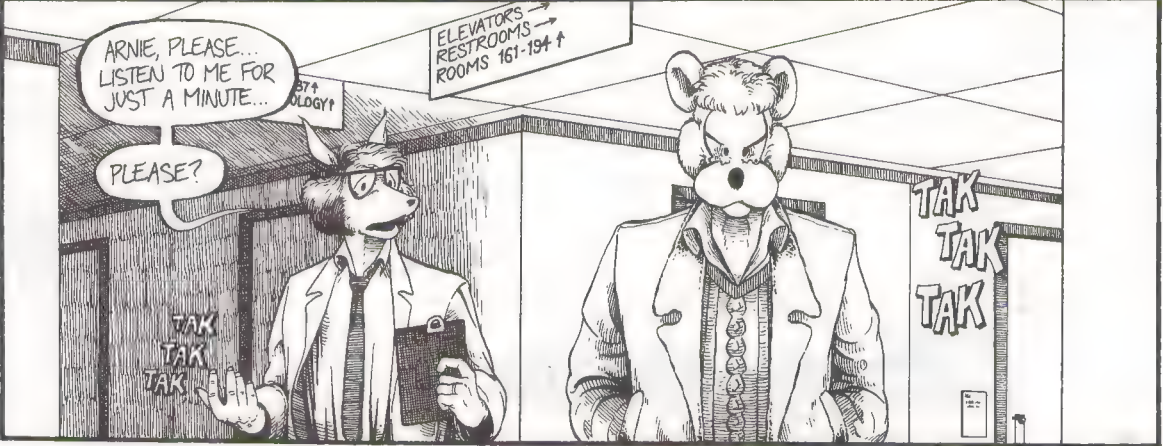
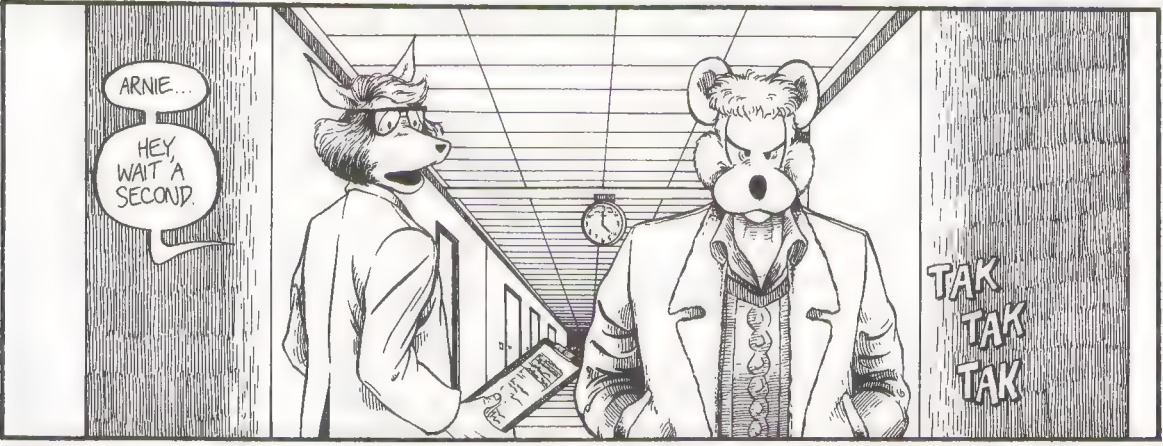
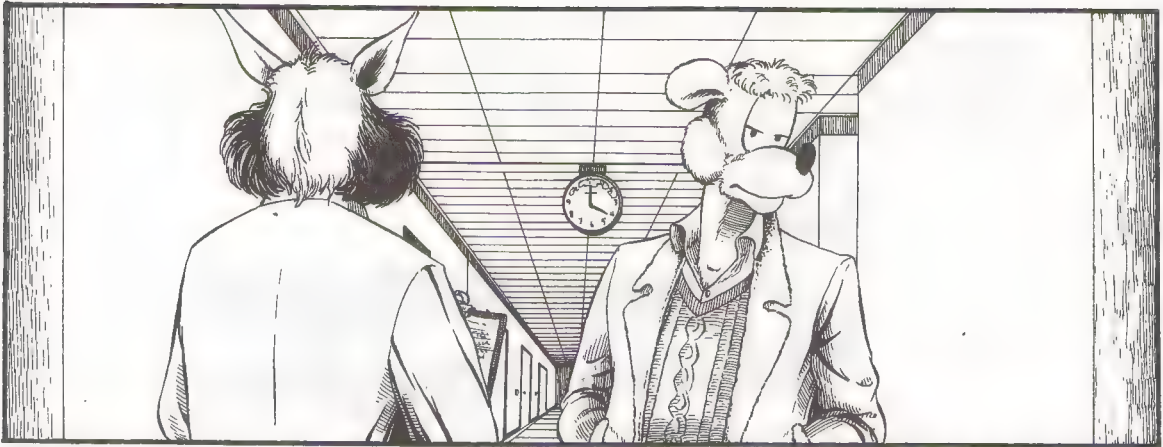
OKAY.



KLIK







ARNIE, CAN I BRING YOU SOMETHING? YOU OKAY?



NO...NO...

I'LL BE FINE. JUST TIRED.

I JUST WANTED YOU TO KNOW I WAS CONCERNED... I DIDN'T MEAN TO...

I KNOW. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.... JUST HELP ERICA.



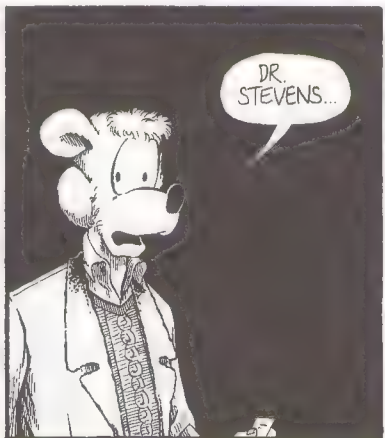
YOU DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT...

LOOK, TAKE ONE OF MY CARDS WITH YOU...

AND GET SOME SLEEP.

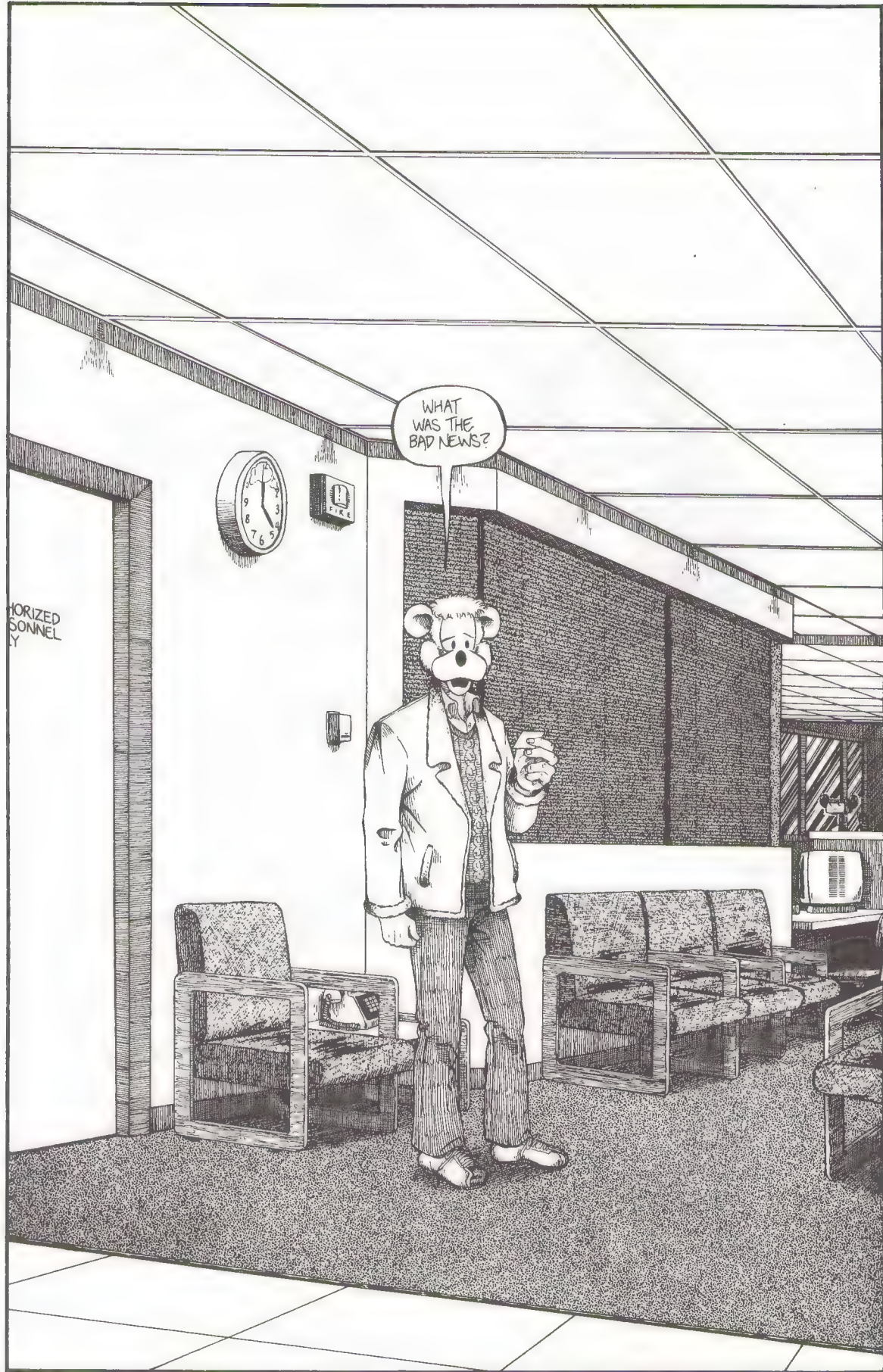


TAK TAK TAK TAK



DR. STEVENS...





OOPS...

SORRY ABOUT THAT.
GUESS WE GOT OFF TO KIND
OF A HEAVY START
THERE.

OH, WELL...

HEY, THIS ISN'T AS EASY AS
IT LOOKS! YOU TRY GOING OVER
YOUR LIFE STORY AND SEE
IF YOU DON'T GET EMBARRASSED!

WELL, LOOK. WHY DON'T WE
SKIP BACK A SHORT WAY? WE
CAN GO BACK TO—

—WELL—

—THE BEGINNING OF WHAT
GOT ME WHERE I AM NOW.

IT SEEMS LIKE A MORE
NORMAL BEGINNING.

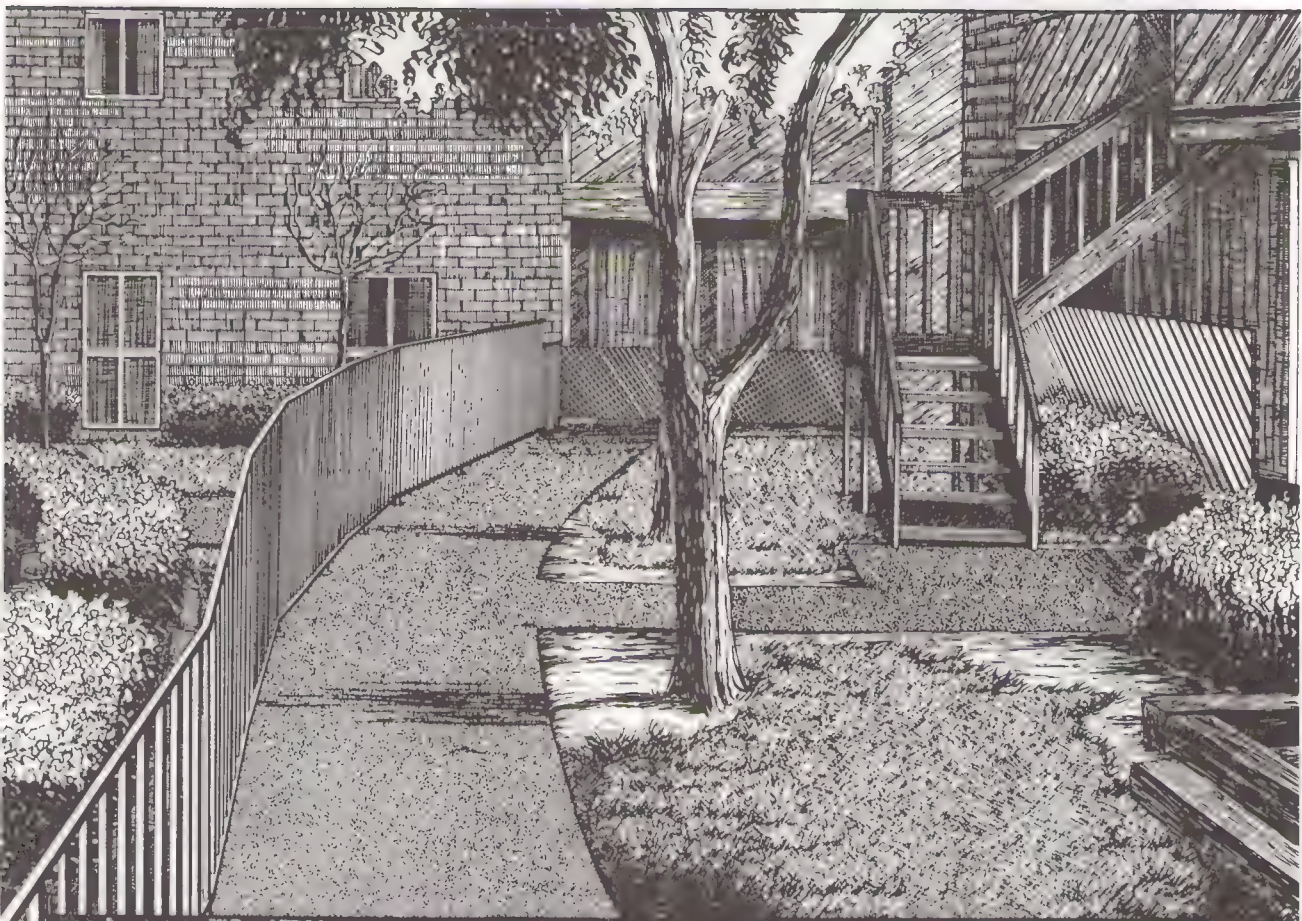
SEE?! I **TOLD** YOU I GET ALL
CONFUSED! I GUESS I GET CONFUSED
NO MATTER WHAT I DO.

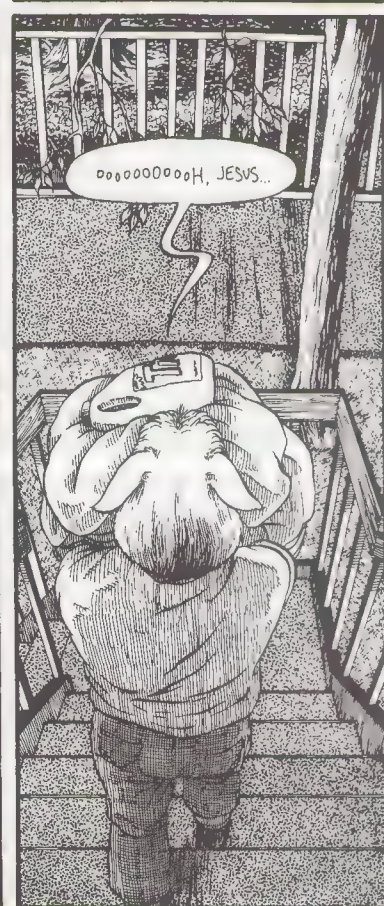
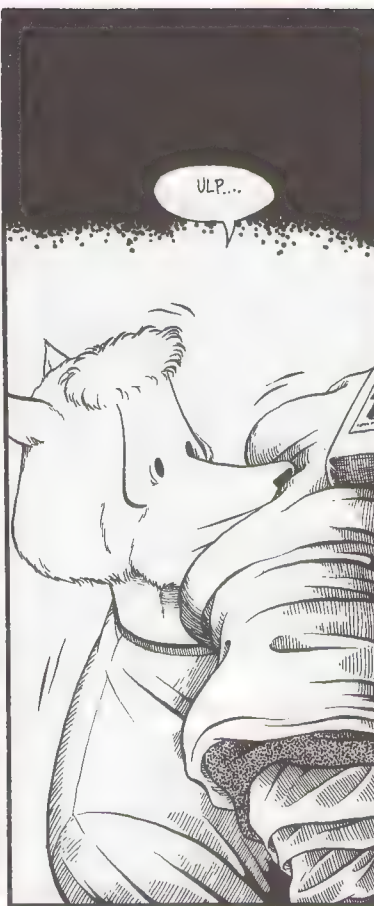
YEAH, I KNOW. WHINE WHINE...BITCH BITCH.

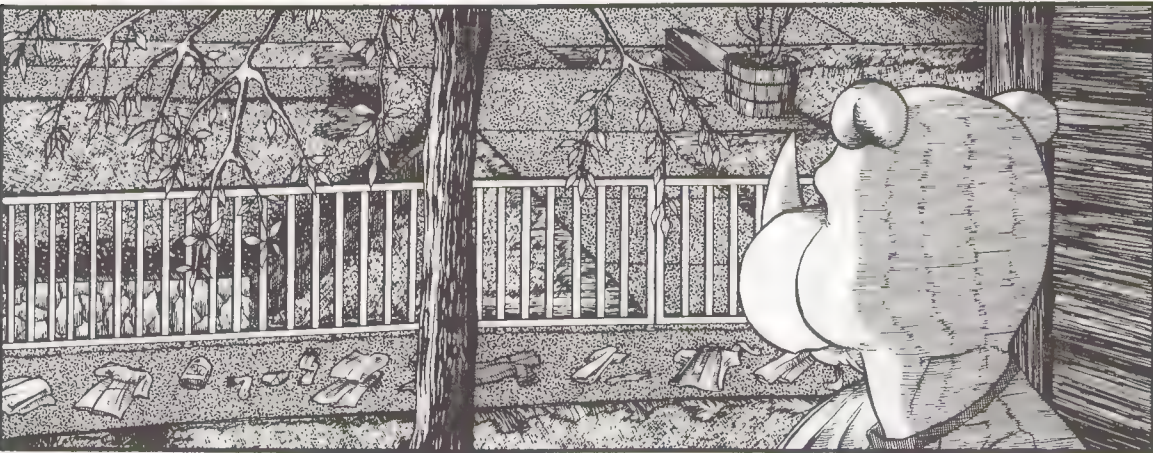
ALL RIGHT ALREADY.
ONCE MORE,
FROM THE MIDDLE!

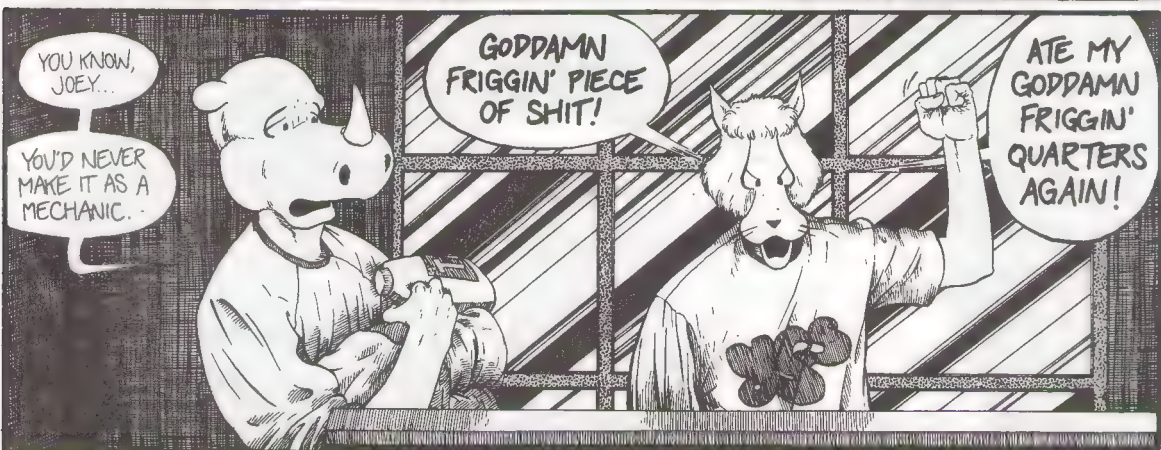
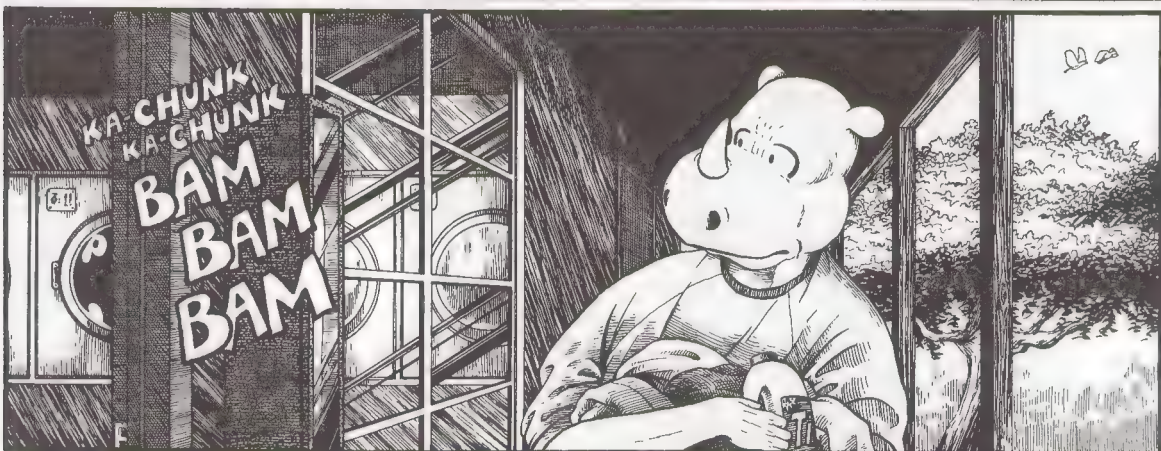
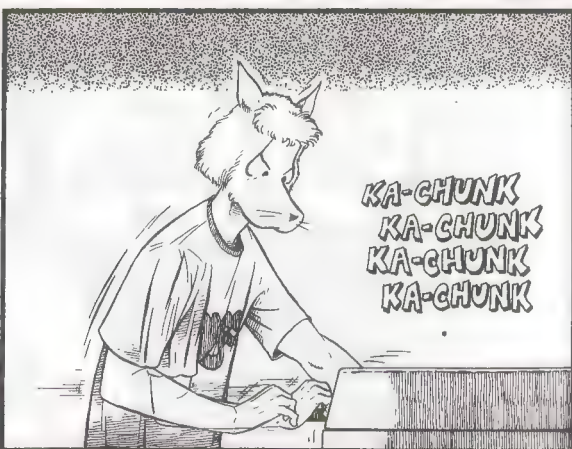
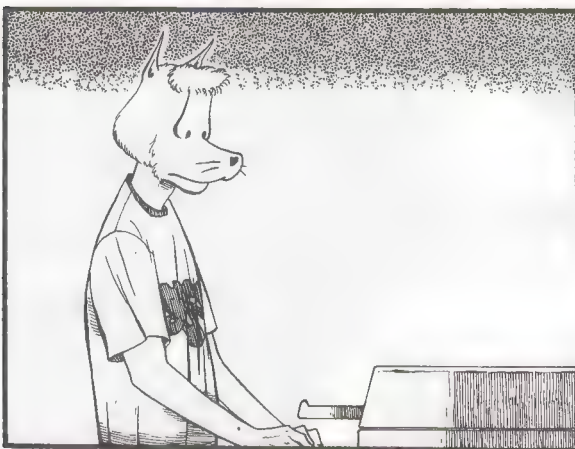
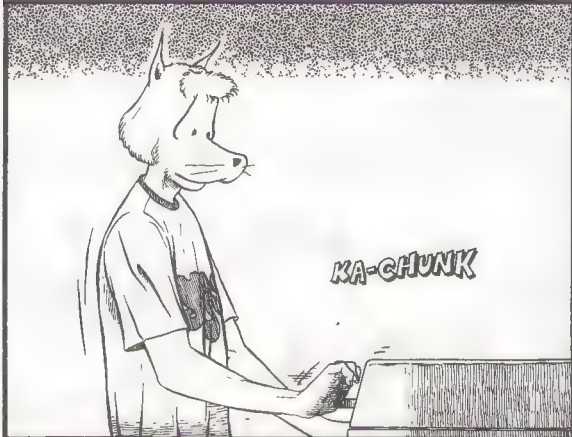
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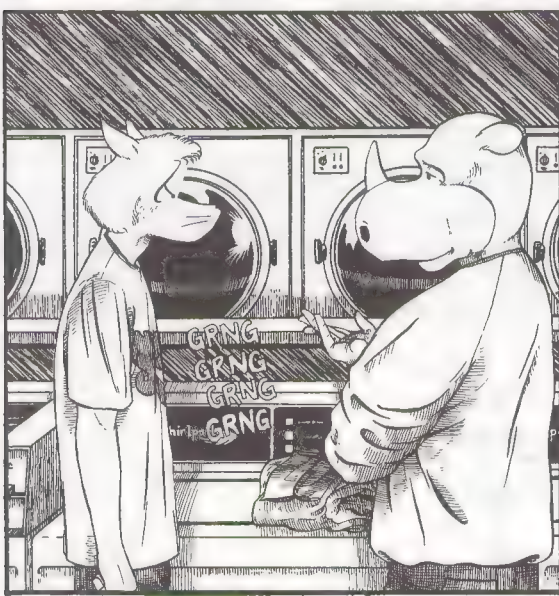


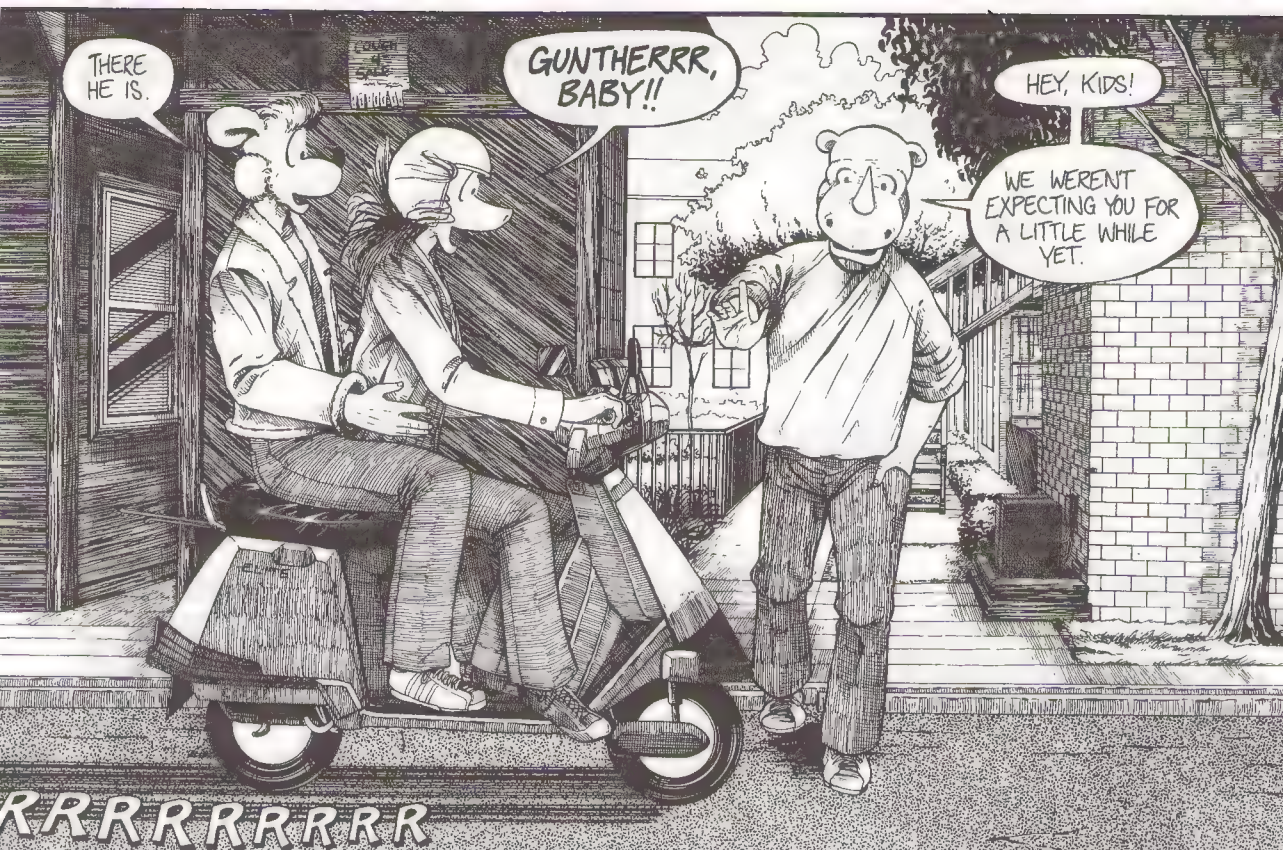


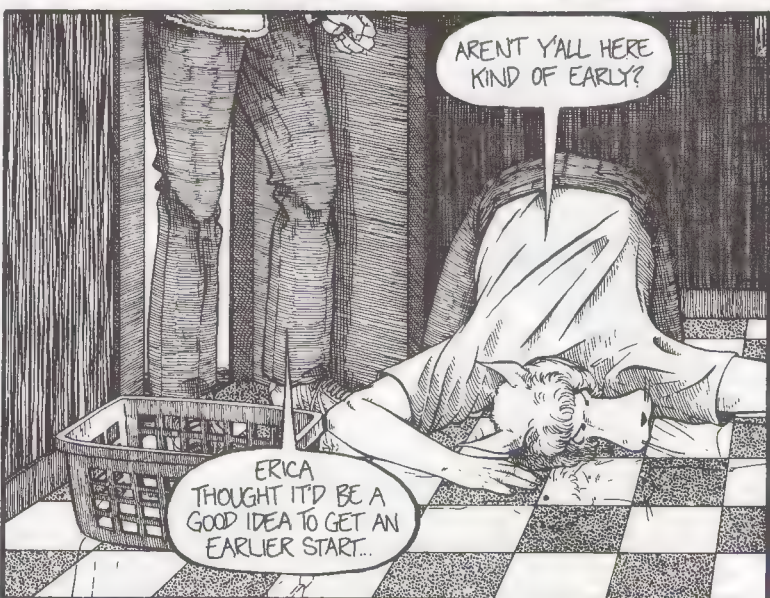
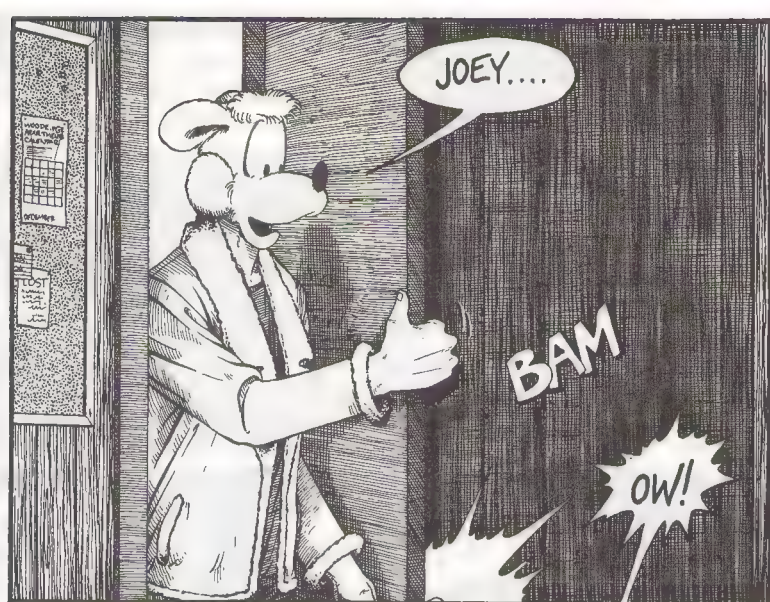
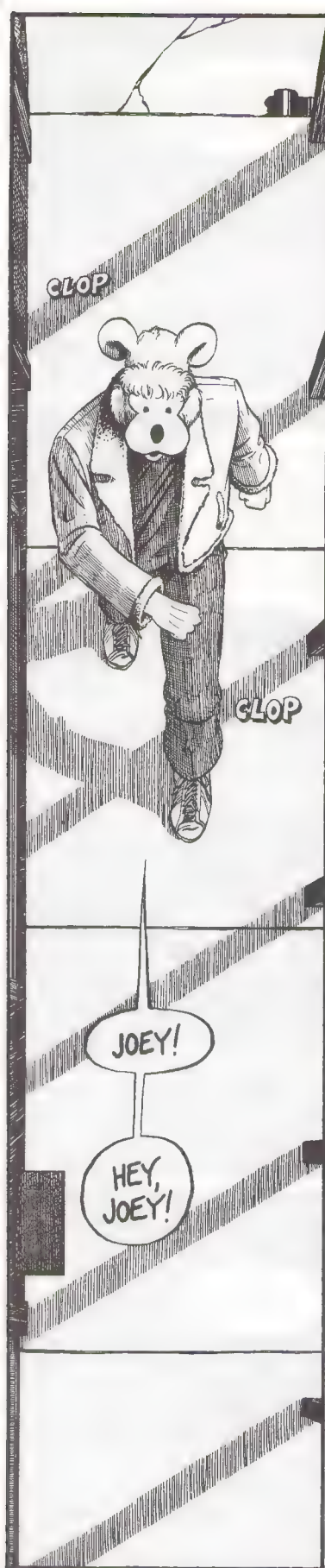






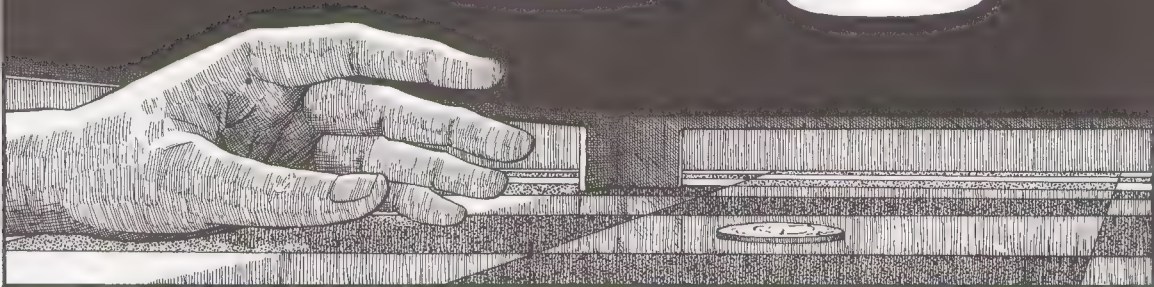






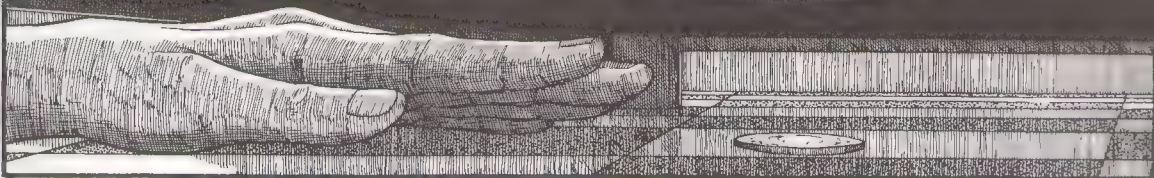
WELL, LISTEN, I
REALLY DONT THINK I
FEEL LIKE COMING...

AH, COME ON,
JOEY! I NEED YOU
TO COME ALONG!



YOU **NEED** ME
TO COME ALONG?

YEAH! I WANT TO SHOW
YOU THE RING I'M GETTING
ERICA. GUNTHER'S GOING TO
BE KEEPING HER BUSY
SO WE CAN HAVE PLENTY OF
TIME TO OURSELVES.



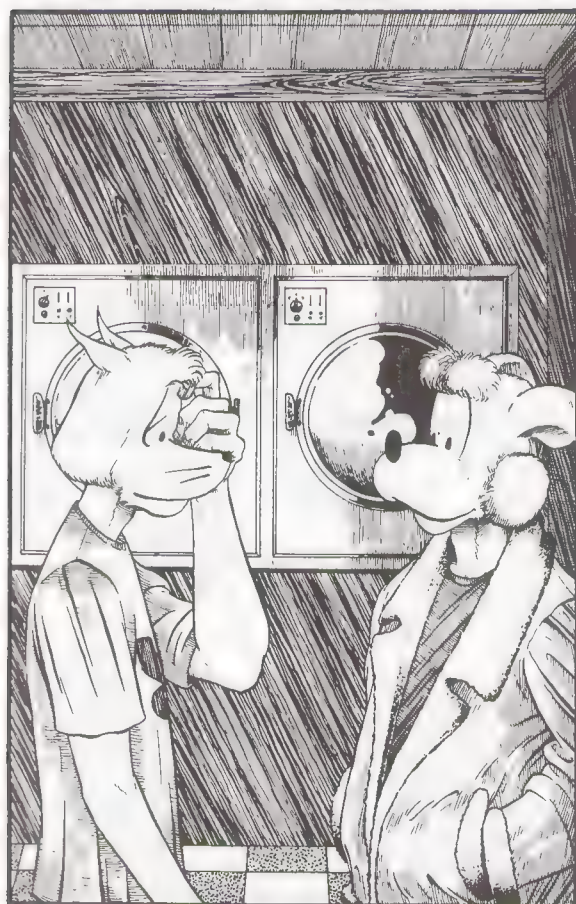
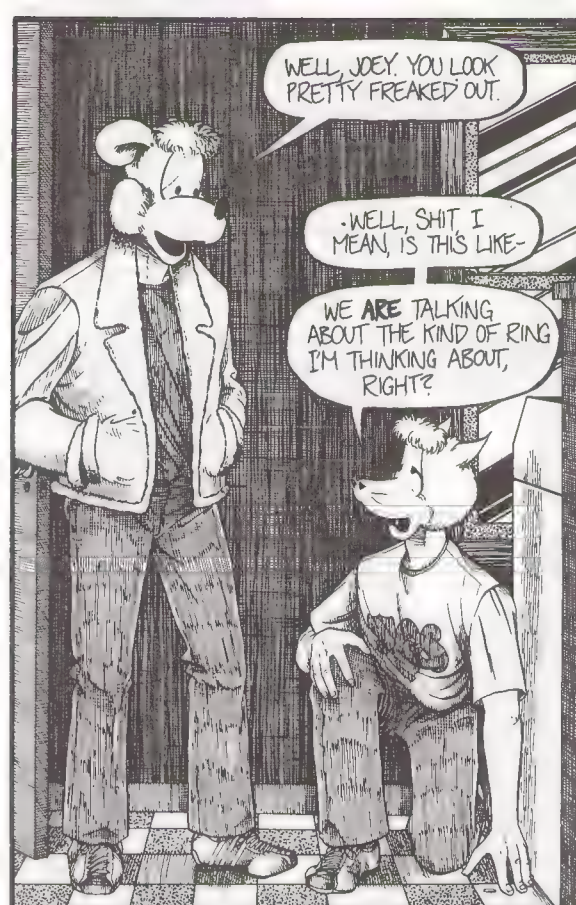
TINK

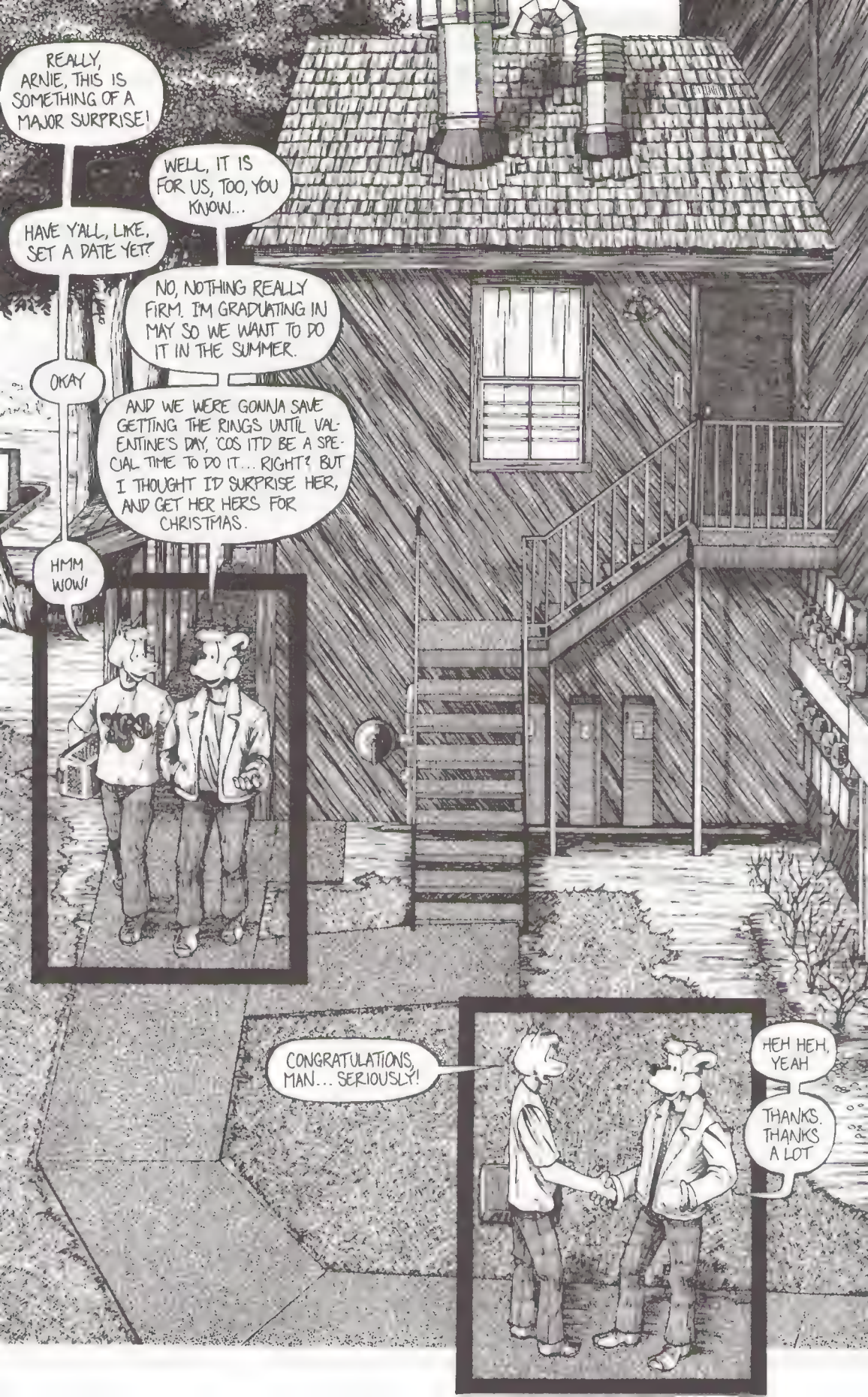


RING?

THAT'S
RI-I-IGHT!







REALLY,
ARNIE, THIS IS
SOMETHING OF A
MAJOR SURPRISE!

WELL, IT IS
FOR US, TOO, YOU
KNOW...

HAVE Y'ALL, LIKE,
SET A DATE YET?

NO, NOTHING REALLY
FIRM. I'M GRADUATING IN
MAY SO WE WANT TO DO
IT IN THE SUMMER.

OKAY

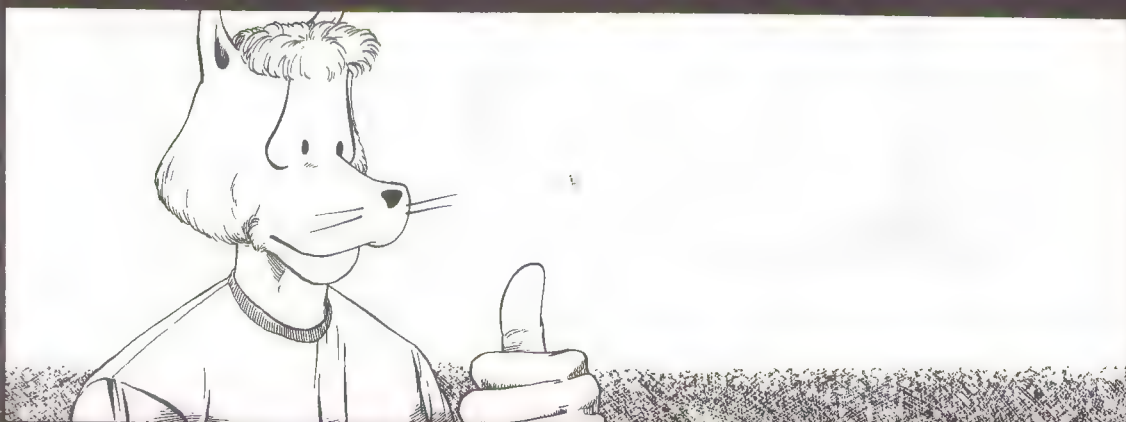
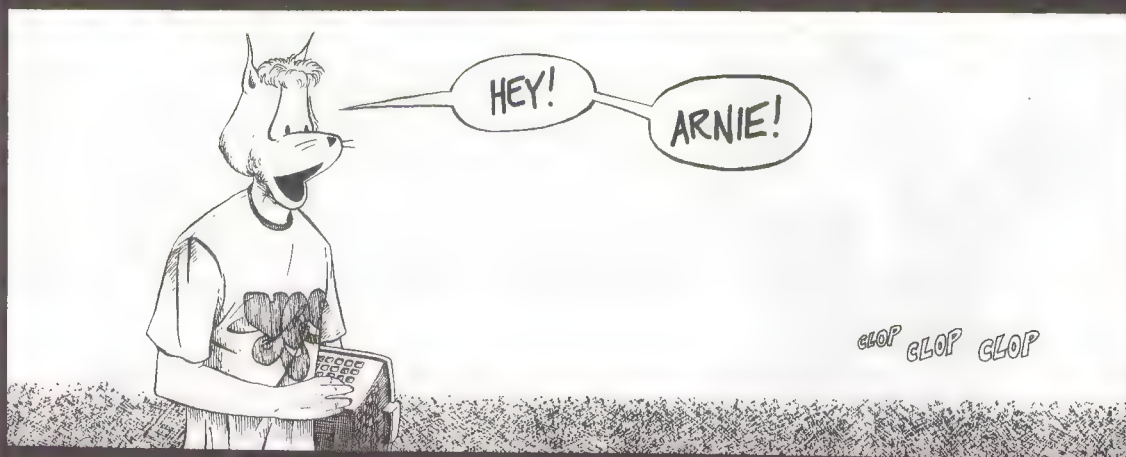
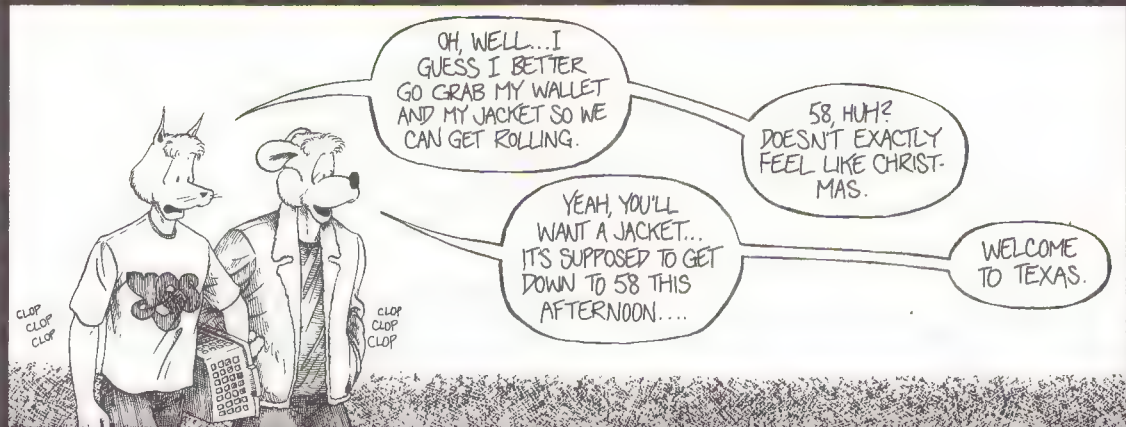
AND WE WERE GONNA SAVE
GETTING THE RINGS UNTIL VAL-
ENTINE'S DAY, 'COS IT'D BE A SPE-
CIAL TIME TO DO IT... RIGHT? BUT
I THOUGHT I'D SURPRISE HER,
AND GET HER HERS FOR
CHRISTMAS.

HMM
WOW!

CONGRATULATIONS,
MAN... SERIOUSLY!

HEH HEH,
YEAH

THANKS.
THANKS
A LOT



SO LIKE I SAID, ABOUT READING...

MY FAVORITE STORYBOOK WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL WAS ABOUT THIS GIRL JUST LIKE ME WHO HAD DREAMS AT NIGHT THAT SHE WAS A PRINCESS IN SOME ENORMOUS PAVILION MADE OUT OF GOLD AND JEWELS AND WITH GREAT BIG CANDY CANES FOR COLUMNS.

ALL HER TOYS WERE THERE AND THEY CAME TO LIFE, AND THEY ALL WENT ON NEATO ADVENTURES.

I KNOW. IT SOUNDS LIKE SOME 'WIZARD OF OZ' RIPOFF. PROBABLY WAS. I DIDN'T GIVE A SHIT. I LOVED IT....

IT WASN'T 'TIL I WAS A TEENAGER THAT I STARTED HAVING DREAMS ABOUT MY OWN PAVILION, EXCEPT MINE WASN'T MADE OUT OF GOLD OR JEWELS OR CANDY.

IT WAS ALL LIKE WHITE TILE.

AND EVERY TIME I TRIED TO GO INSIDE THE DREAM WOULD TURN INTO THIS CRAZY NIGHTMARE AND I'D WAKE UP ON THE FLOOR OR SOMETHING. AND I'D BE FREAKED OUT FOR DAYS.

GOOD GUESS-NO, I NEVER COULD REMEMBER WHAT THE NIGHTMARE WAS.

SO I TOLD MYSELF IT DIDN'T MATTER.

AND THEN I STARTED SAYING **THAT** SO MANY TIMES AND IN SO MANY SITUATIONS I GUESS I STARTED LIVING BY IT: "IT DOESN'T MATTER."

NOTHING MATTERS.



EXCEPT ARNIE.

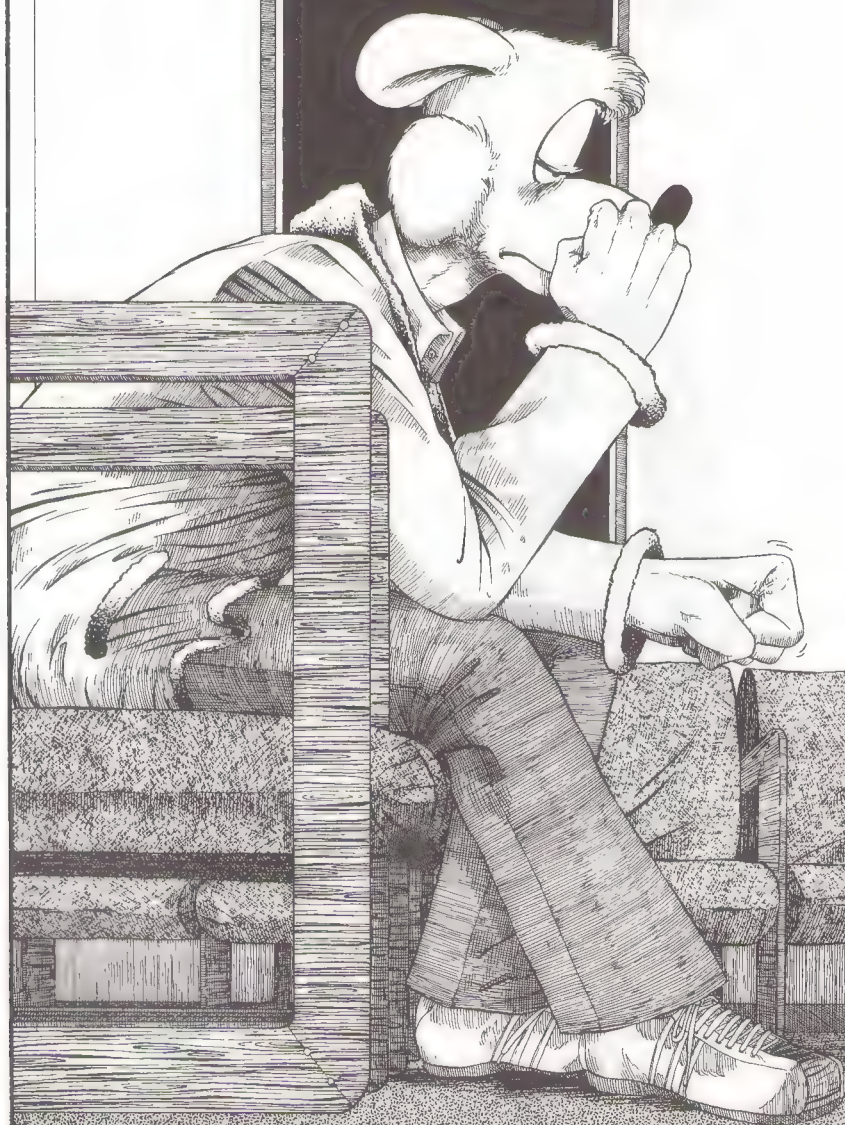
ARNIE MATTERS....



DR. CARRUTHERS...
DR. CARRUTHERS...
PICK UP FOUR-FIVE,
PLEASE... DR. CARRUTHERS...
FOUR-FIVE...

...KILLS OVER
TWICE AS MANY
GERMS AS THE NEXT
LEADING BRAND!...

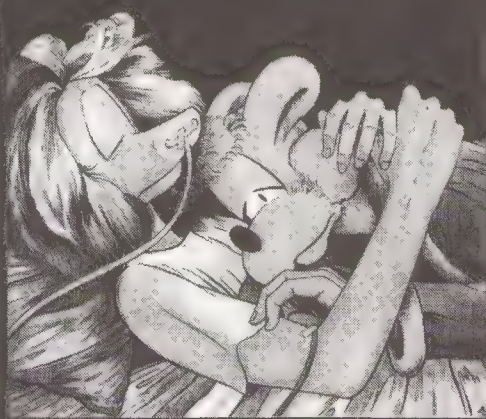
Snap
KILLS
GERMS

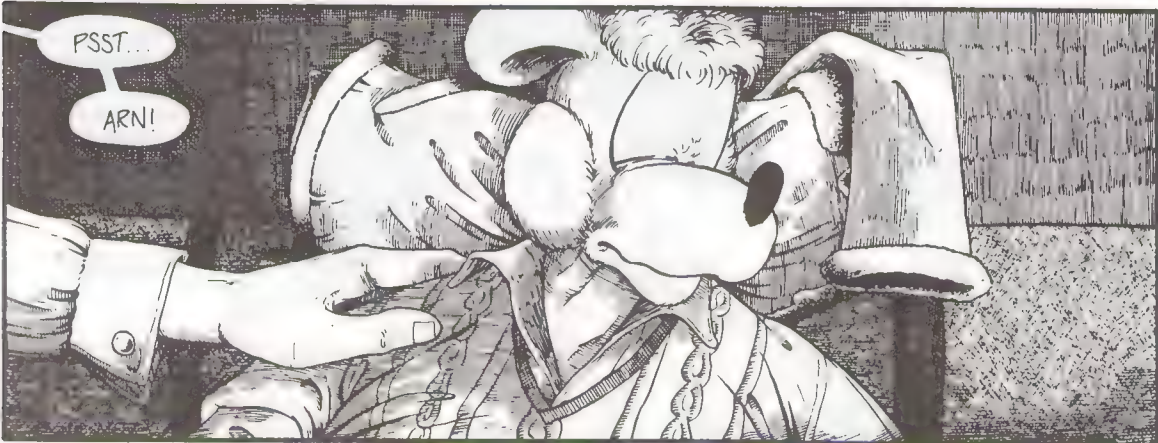


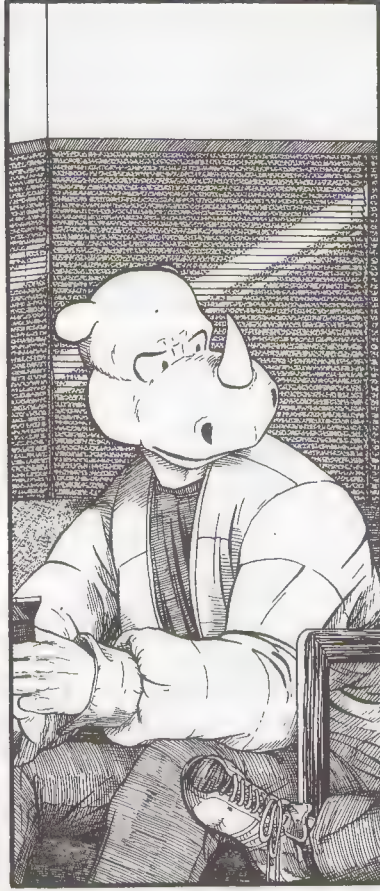
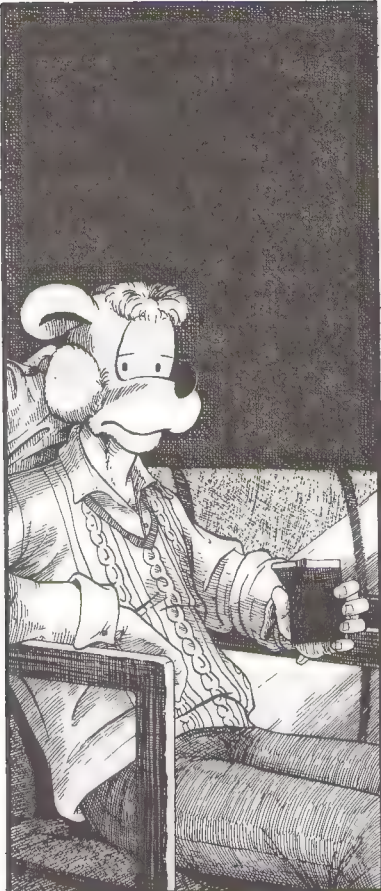
CHAPTER II

Into the Pavilions

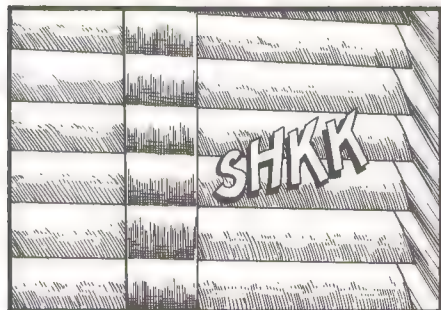
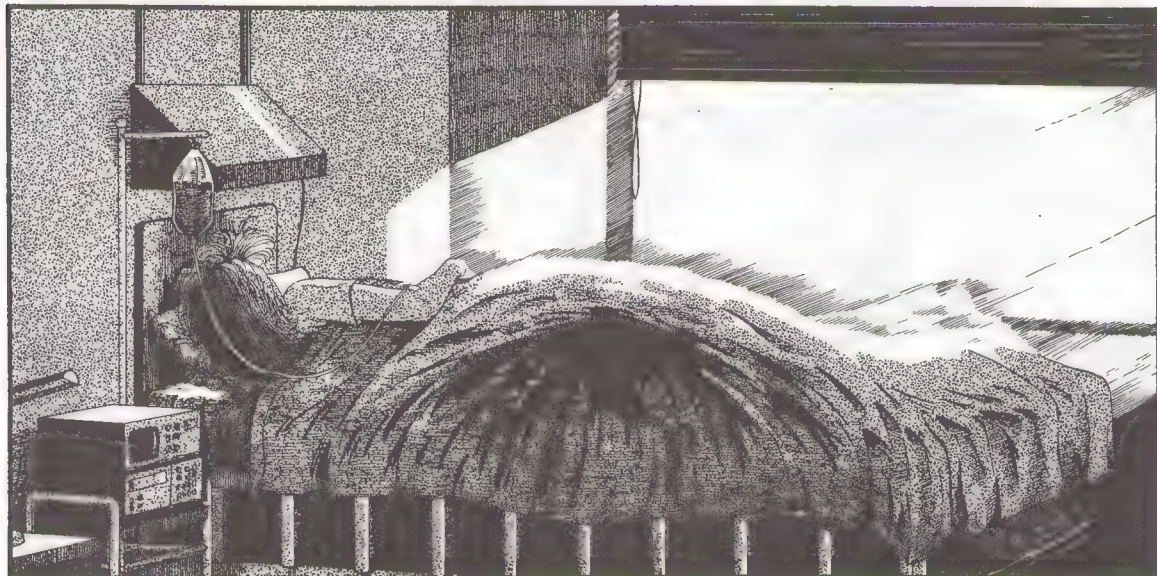
HERCULES
THE ANIMATED SERIES

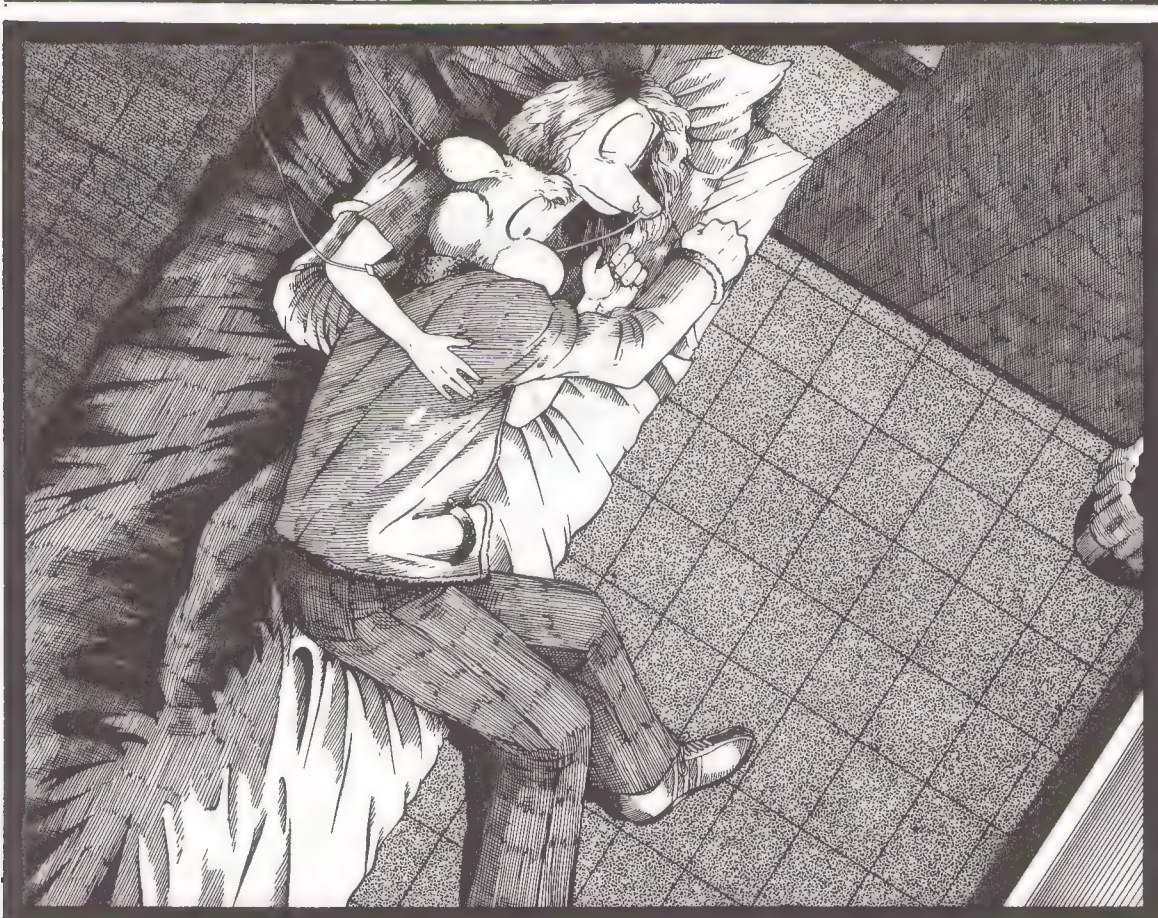
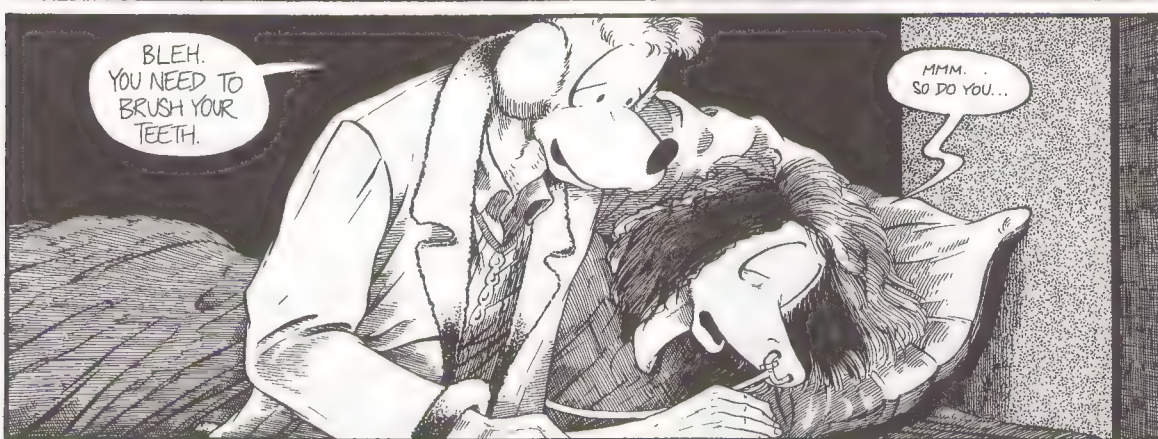
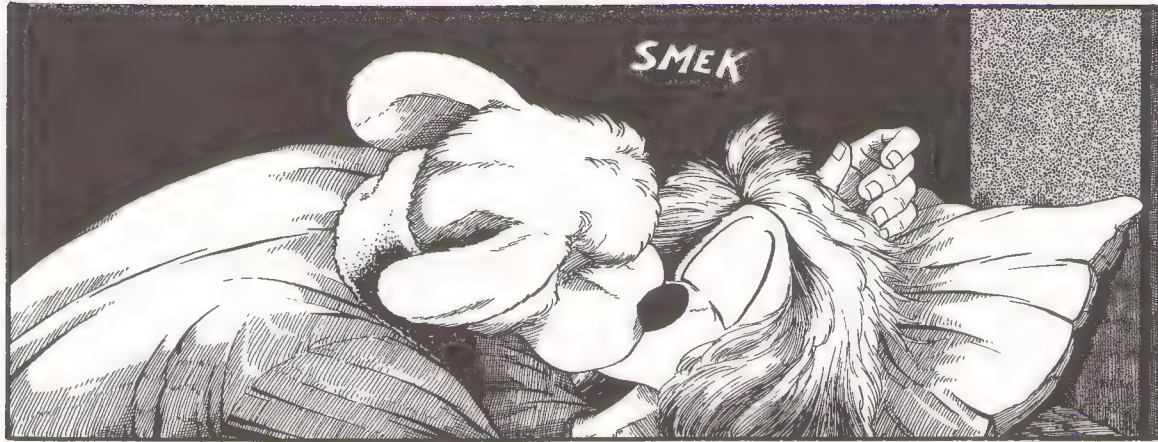






CREEAK





GOD DAMN IT!

THAT'S TWICE THIS WEEK
I'VE TURNED THIS DAMN ANKLE!

OH, I'VE BEEN PRACTISING SOME MOVES
A DANCER FRIEND OF MINE FROM NEW ORLEANS
NAMED MADELIENE TRIED TO TEACH ME WAY
BACK.

I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO
DO HALF THE STUFF SHE DID.

AND THESE FEET HAVEN'T QUITE
BEEN THE SAME SINCE I'VE BEEN
IN THE HOSPITAL.

BOURBON STREET DANCING CAN GET
PRET-TY WILD, IF YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT.

I MEAN, WE SWING FROM THE RAFTERS,
TWIRL AROUND THE POLE UPSIDE DOWN—
DO STUFF YOU'D HAVE TO SEE TO BELIEVE.
ANYTHING FOR A FUN SHOW, RIGHT?

THERE WAS ONE GIRL
WHEN I WAS THERE WHO
CALLED HERSELF "AURORA."
I DIDN'T KNOW HER WELL,
BUT MADELIENE DID.

WELL, ONE NIGHT—AND I GUESS SHE MUST
HAVE BEEN COKE D OUT OF HER MIND BECAUSE
SHE SAID SHE NEVER FELT IT—AURORA WAS
SWINGING FROM THE RAFTERS WITH ONE HAND,
AND SHE LOST HER GRIP AND FLEW INTO A TABLE
WHERE SOME FOOTBALL TEAM WAS SITTING.

SHE DID A SOMERSAULT IN MID-AIR. IT WAS WILD.

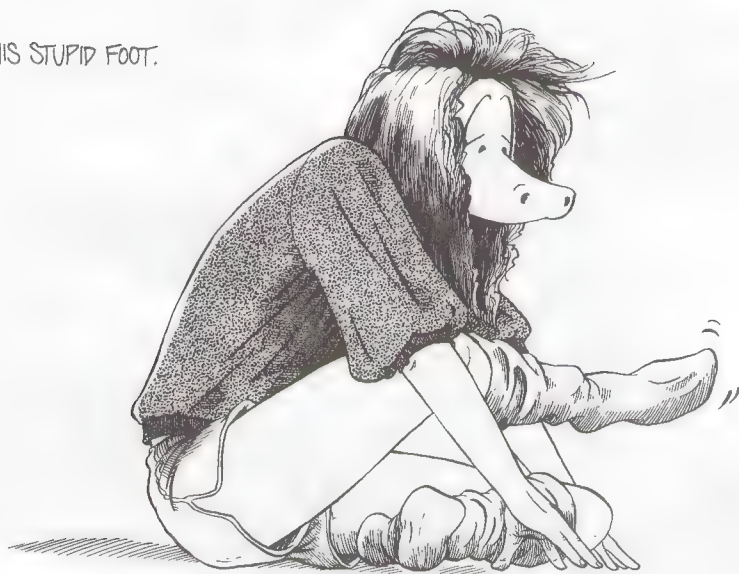
SHE BROKE THREE RIBS AND CRACKED HER PELVIS.
BUT SHE KEPT WANTING TO GET BACK ON STAGE AND
FINISH HER SONG...

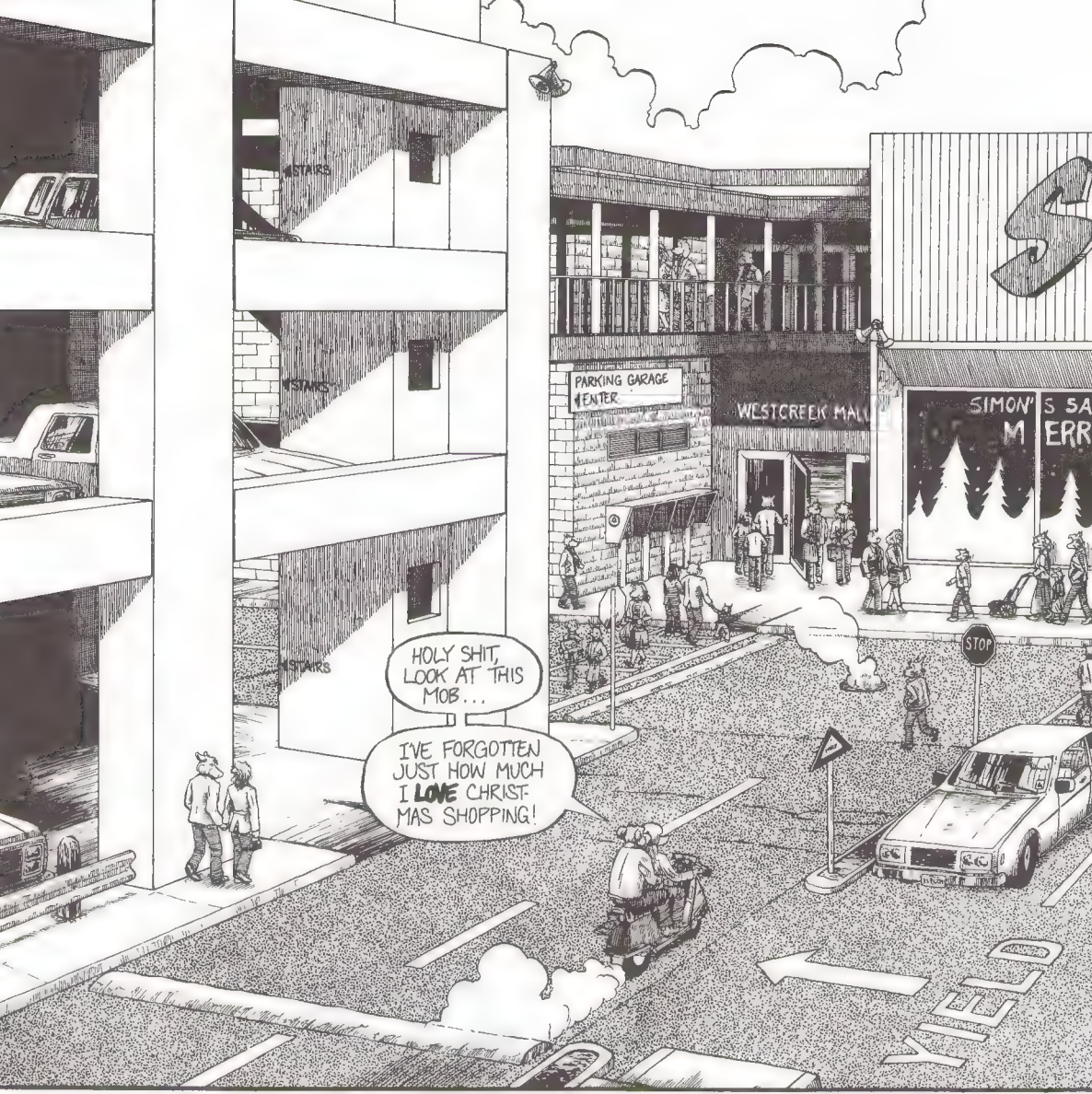
AURORA WAS ALWAYS FUCKED UP ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THOUGH...

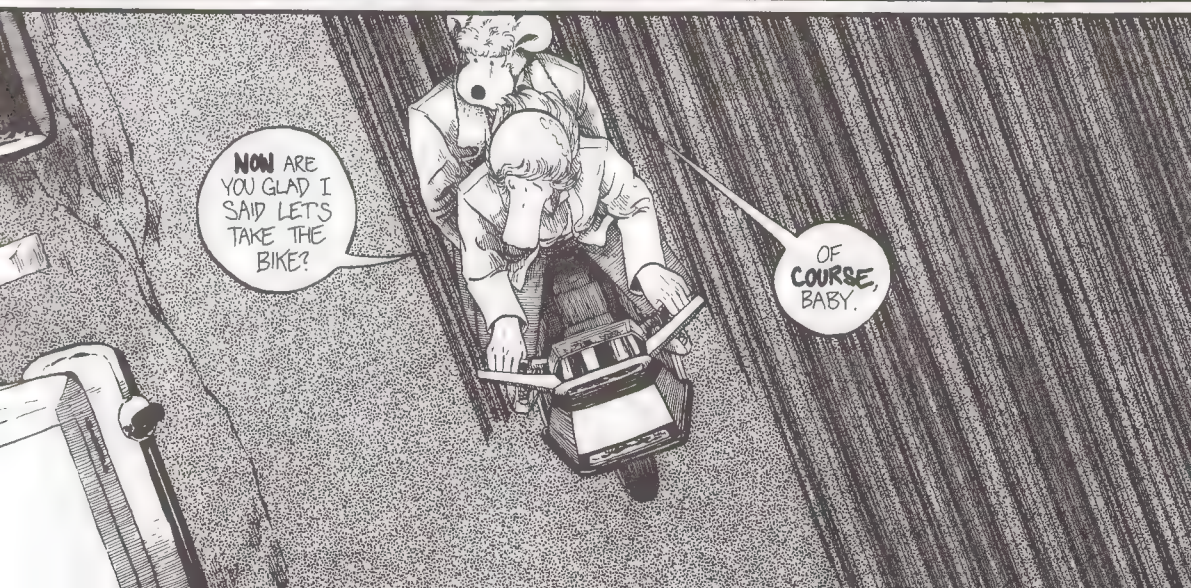


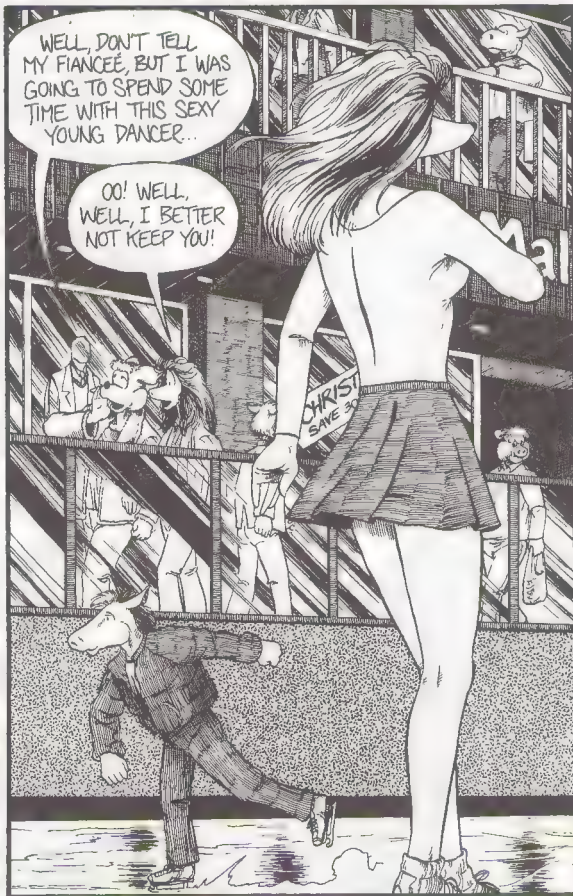
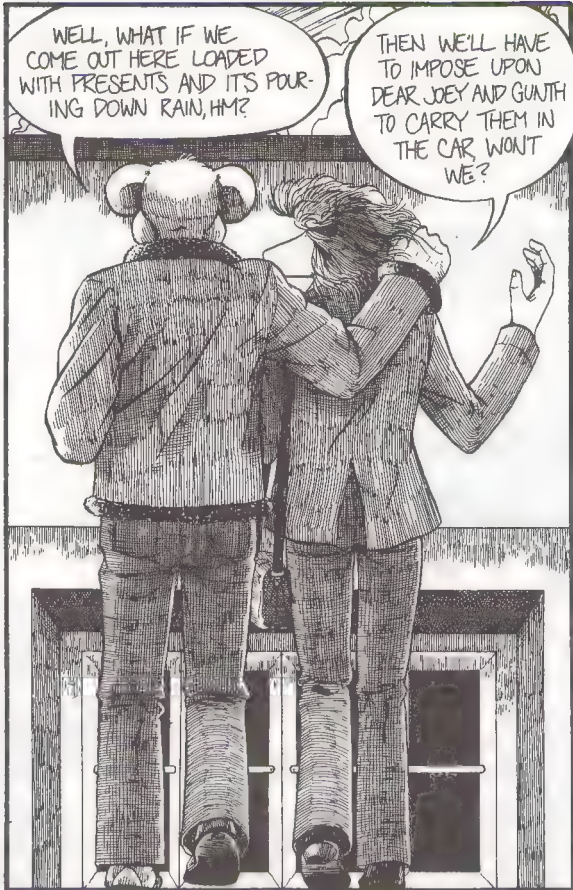
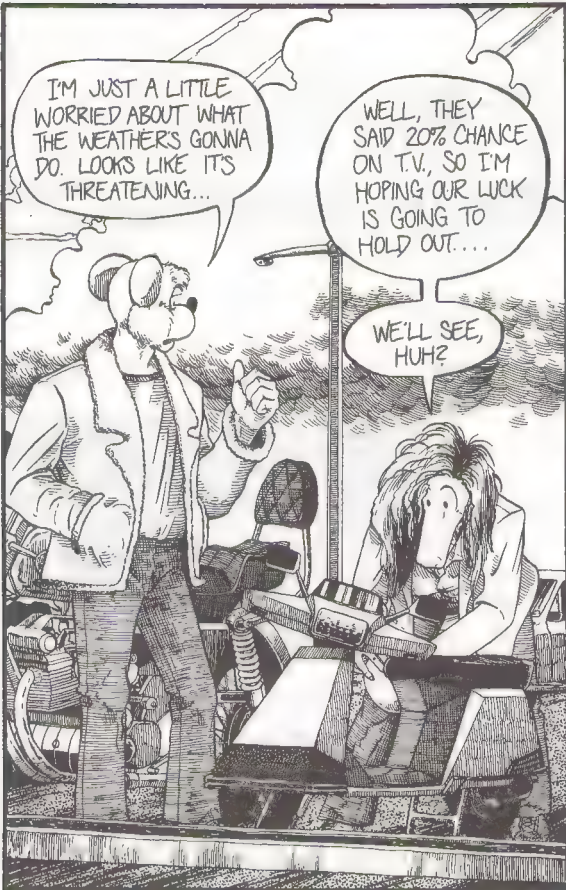
I WONDER WHY I THOUGHT OF HER JUST NOW?

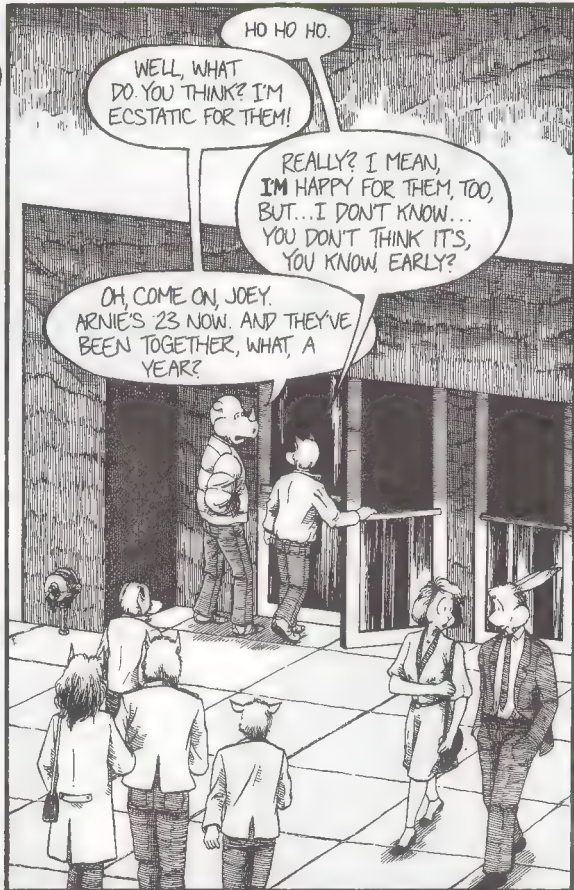
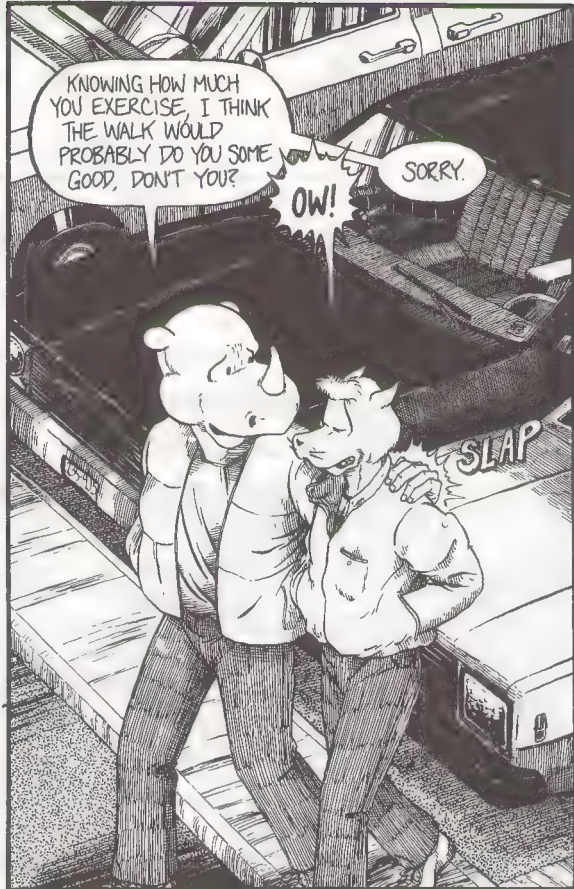
MUST BE THIS STUPID FOOT.

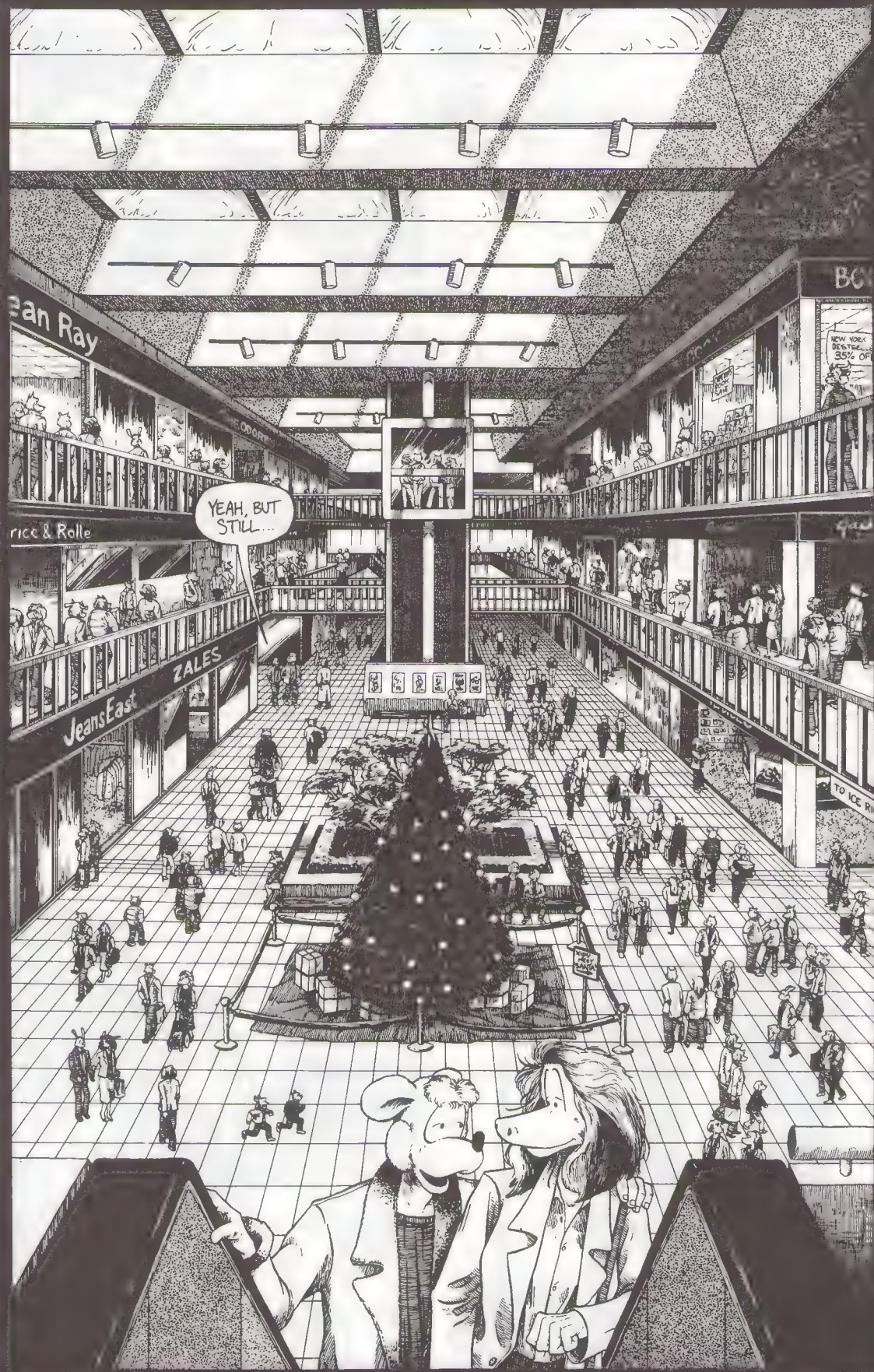


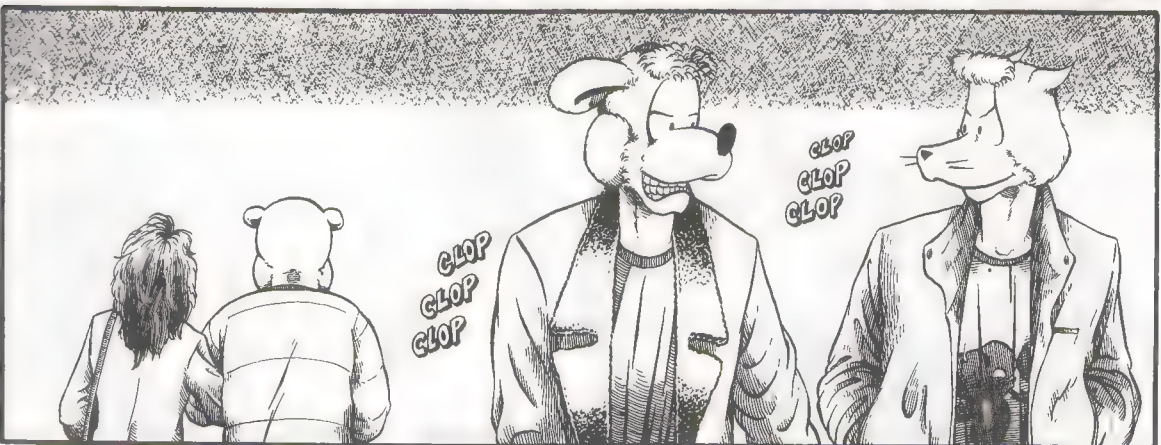
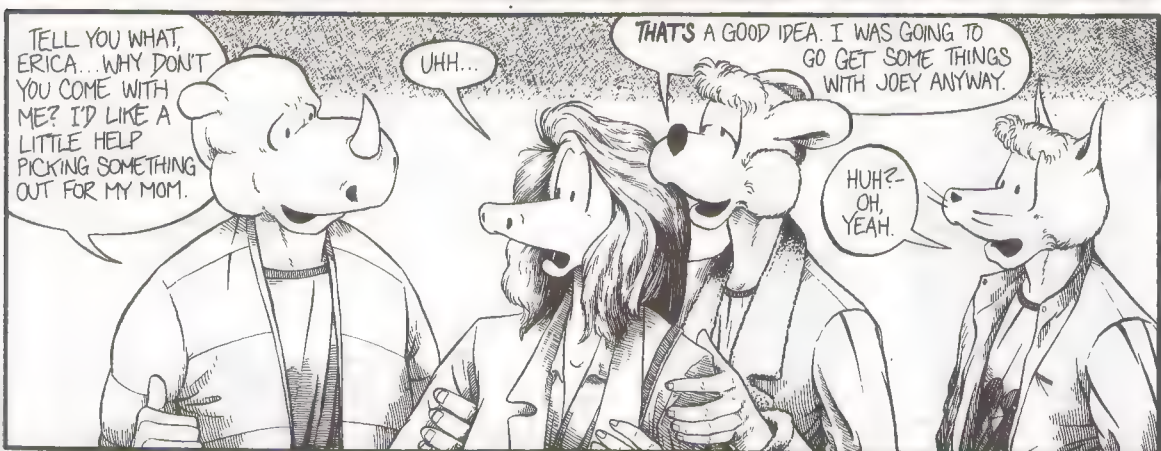


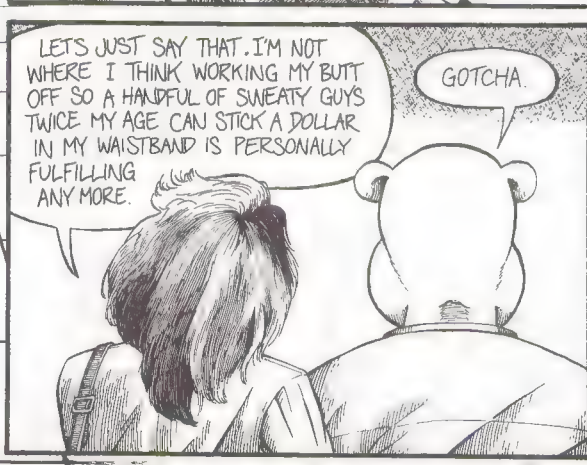
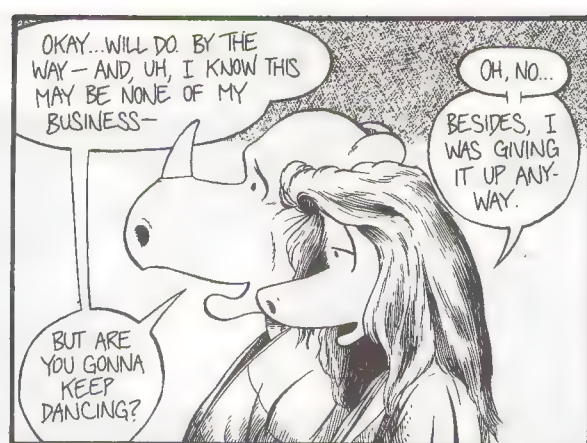
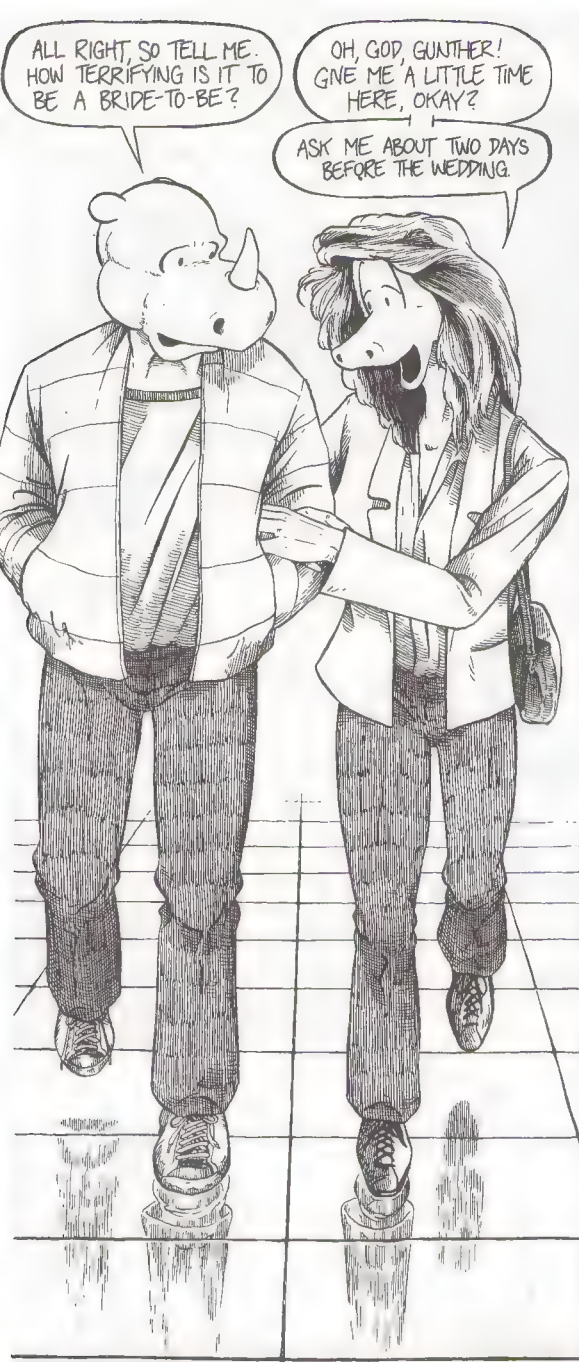














DAMMIT, ARNIE, DON'T PULL SHIT LIKE THAT! I THOUGHT FOR SURE THAT SECURITY GUARD WAS GONNA KICK US OUT!

YEAH! HAR HAR!

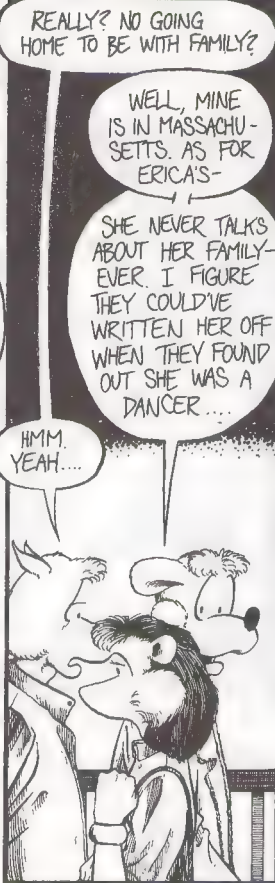
THAT LOOK ON YOUR FACE WAS HILARIOUS, THOUGH!



sigh SO

WHERE ARE YOU AND ERICA GONNA GO FOR CHRISTMAS?

NOWHERE. JUST GONNA HAVE A NICE ROMANTIC LITTLE CHRISTMAS ALL BY OURSELVES.

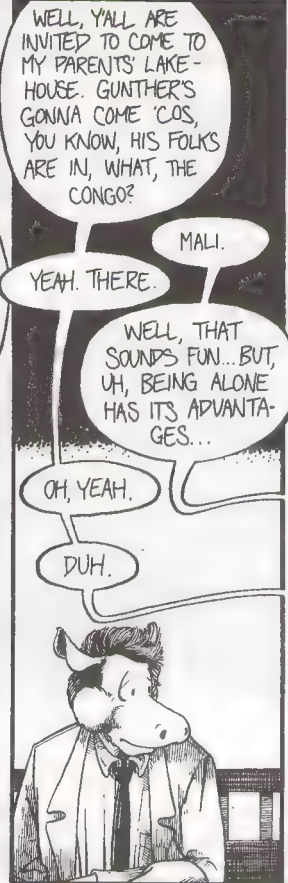


REALLY? NO GOING HOME TO BE WITH FAMILY?

WELL, MINE IS IN MASSACHUSETTS. AS FOR ERICA'S-

SHE NEVER TALKS ABOUT HER FAMILY-EVER. I FIGURE THEY COULDN'T HAVE WRITTEN HER OFF WHEN THEY FOUND OUT SHE WAS A DANCER...

HMM. YEAH....



WELL, YALL ARE INVITED TO COME TO MY PARENTS LAKE-HOUSE. GUNTHER'S GONNA COME 'COS, YOU KNOW, HIS FOLKS ARE IN, WHAT, THE CONGO?

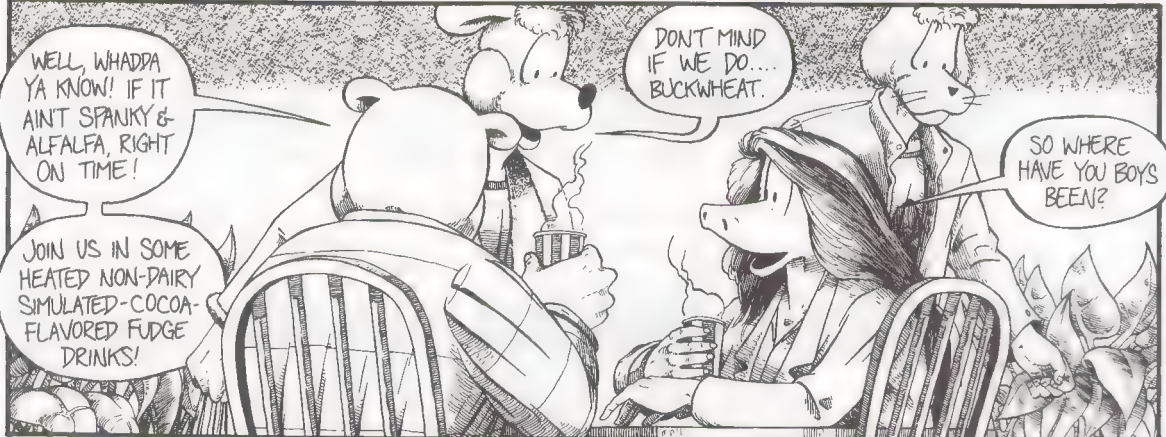
MALI.

YEAH. THERE.

WELL, THAT SOUNDS FUN...BUT, UH, BEING ALONE HAS ITS ADVANTAGES...

OH, YEAH.

DUH.



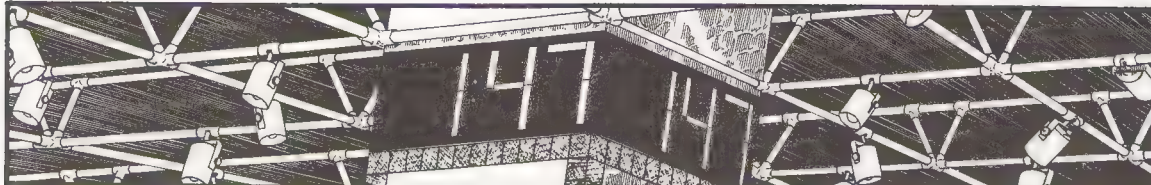
WELL, WHADDA YA KNOW! IF IT AINT SPANKY & ALFALFA, RIGHT ON TIME!

JOIN US IN SOME HEATED NON-DAIRY SIMULATED-COCOA-FLAVORED FUDGE DRINKS!

DON'T MIND IF WE DO... BUCKWHEAT.

SO WHERE HAVE YOU BOYS BEEN?





SEE? DIDN'T I SAY IT WAS GOOD IDEA TO SHOP EARLY? WE BEAT THE LUNCH CROWDS AND ARNIE AND I ARE PRETTY MUCH DONE.

WELL, I STILL GOT A COUPLE THINGS I WANT TO PICK UP FOR MY LITTLE SISTER.

OKAY. WELL, WHY DON'T WE GET LUNCH TOGETHER, THEN YOU TWO CAN FINISH UP YOURSELVES?

SURE. YOU WANNA JUST GO BACK TO THE FOOD COURT?

OH, FER CRYN' OUT LOUD, JOEY!

WHAT? WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE FOOD COURT?

DOES THE TERM "GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT INFECTION" MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?

LOOK, THERE'S A CAFETERIA JUST DOWN THE ESCALATORS.

THAT'LL DO.

I'M STUMPED ANYWAY. WHAT DO YOU BUY A ONE-YEAR OLD GIRL?

EASY SET OF PLASTIC CARKEYS.

SHE ALWAYS JUST PLAYS WITH DAD'S, THOUGH.

THAT'S WHY YOU BUY HER SOME PLASTIC ONES, EINSTEIN.

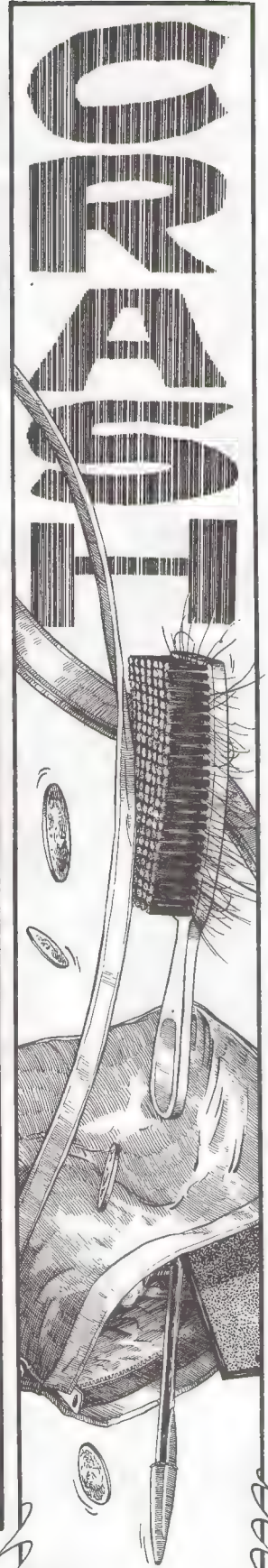
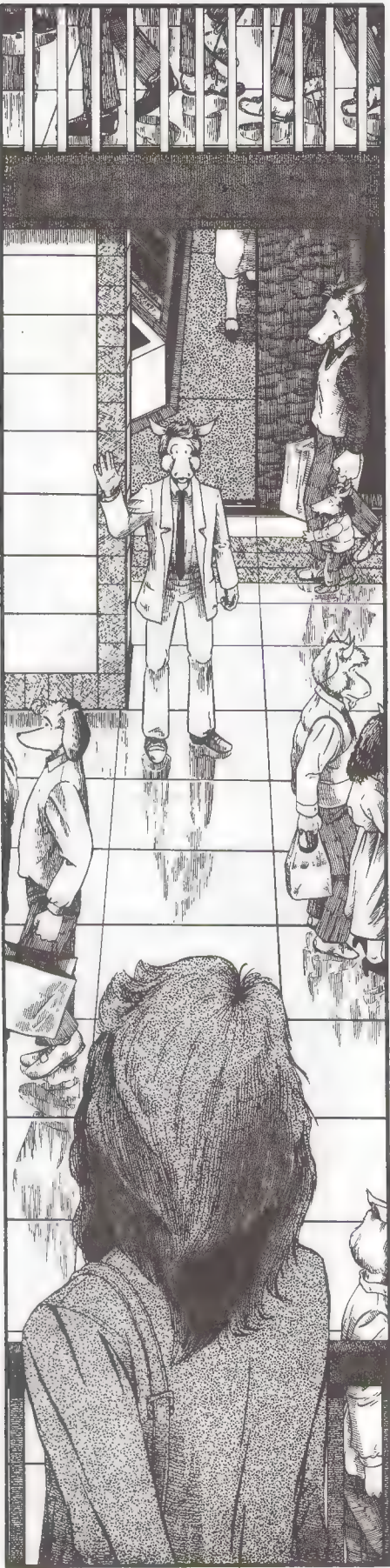
OH. RIGHT

HOW'S YOUR FOLK'S DOIN', JOEY..?

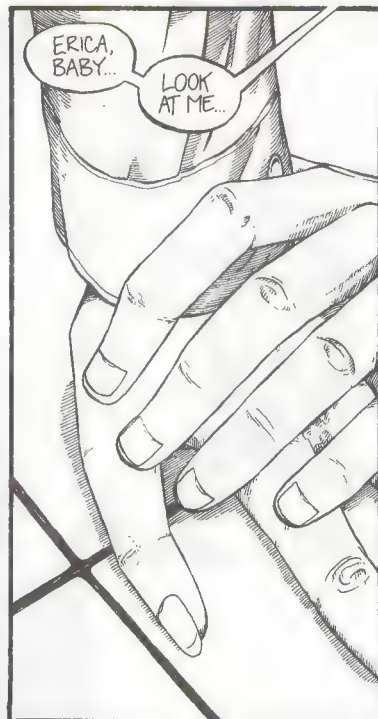
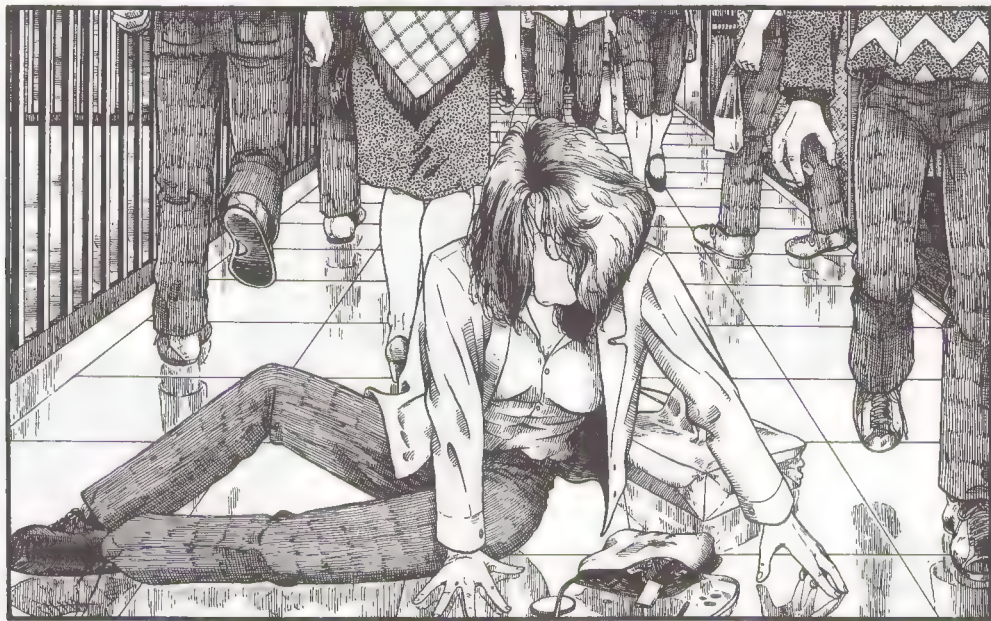
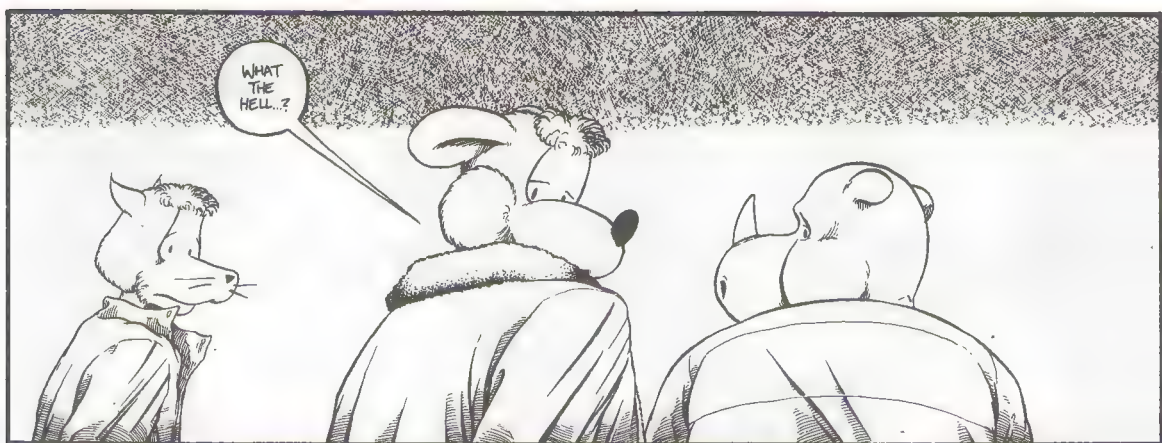
FINE. MORE BEEN WORKIN' HARD.

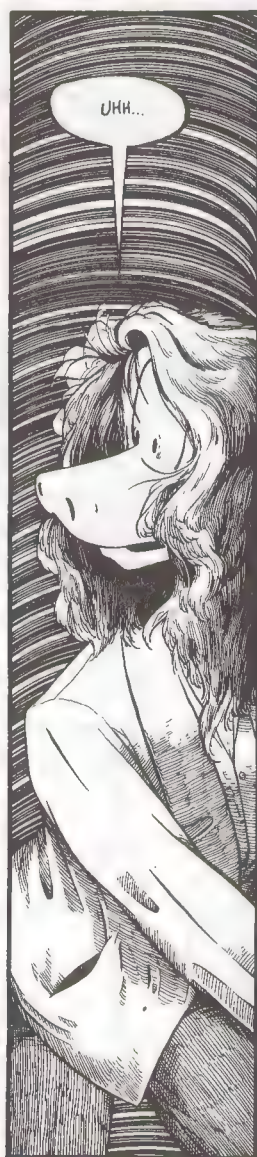
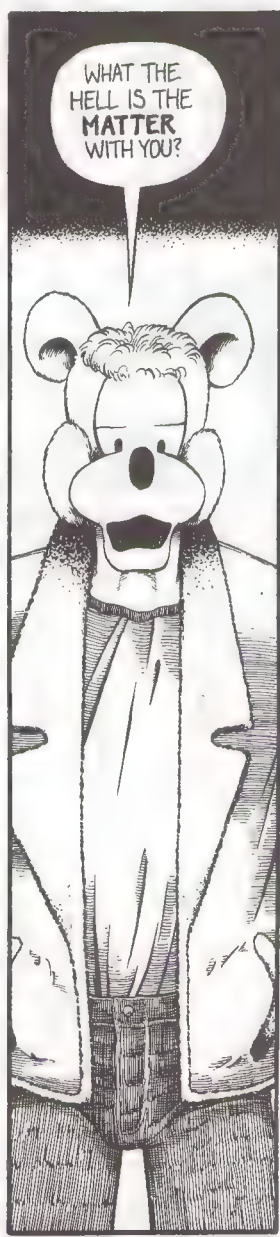
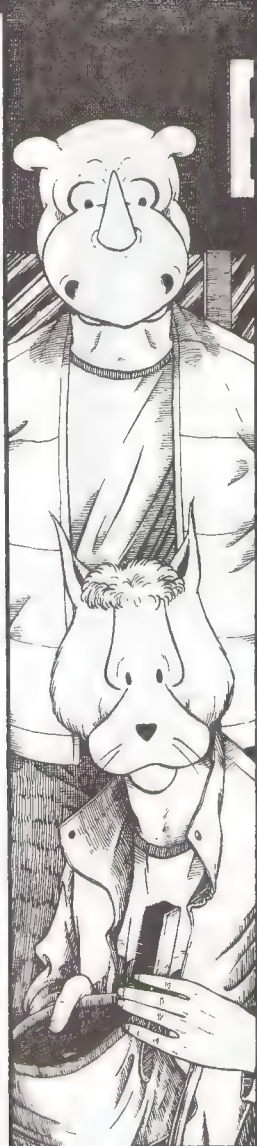
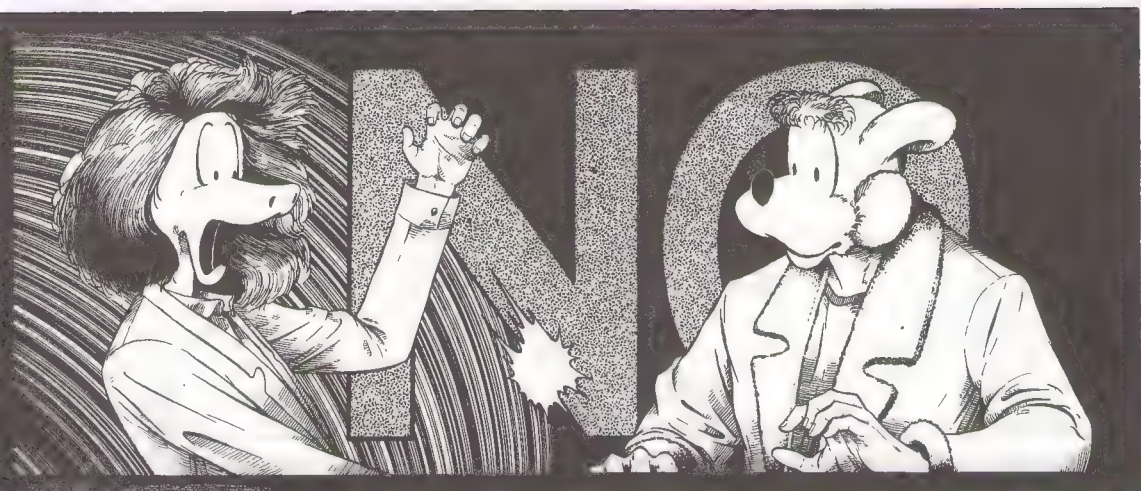
OH, RIGHT

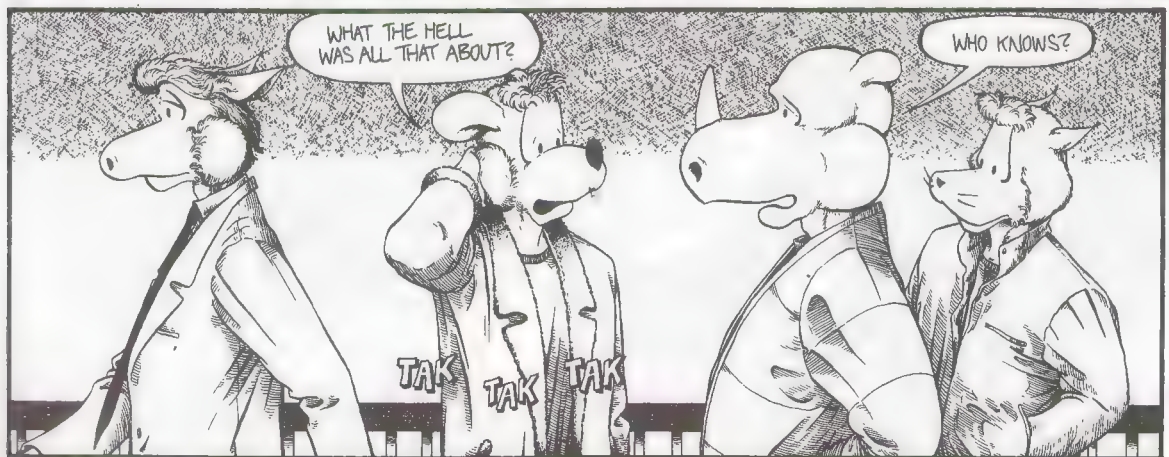
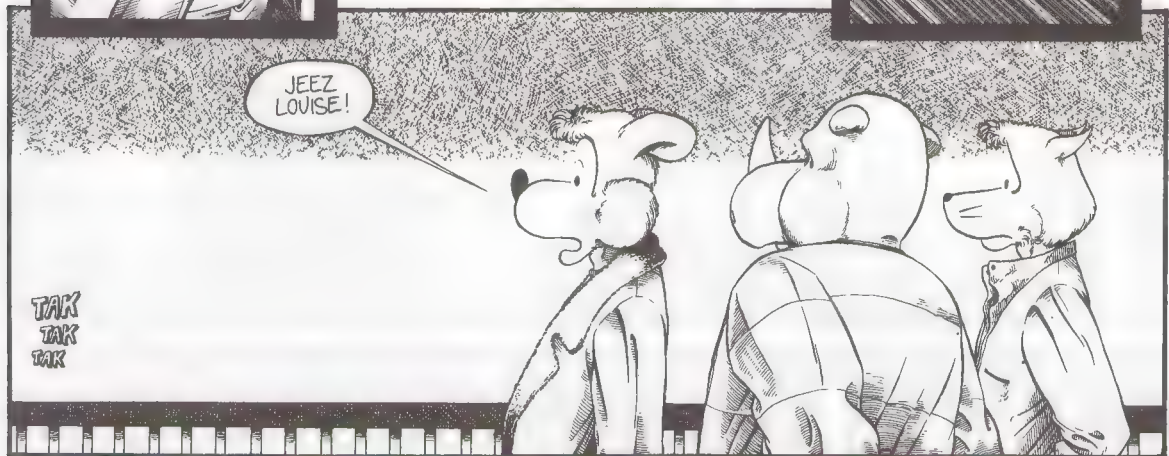


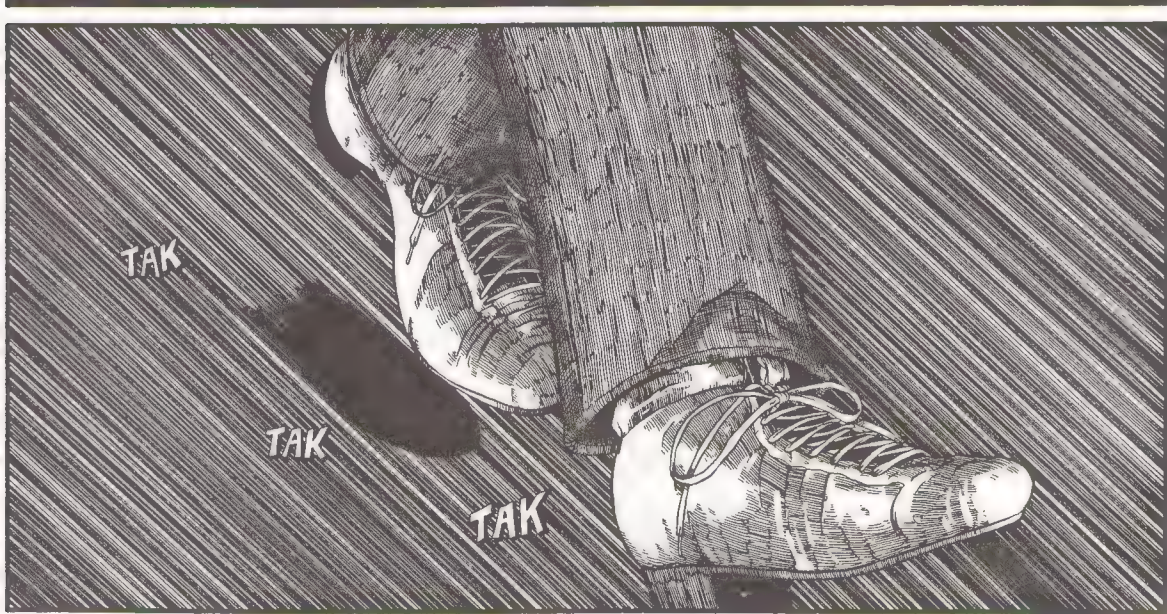
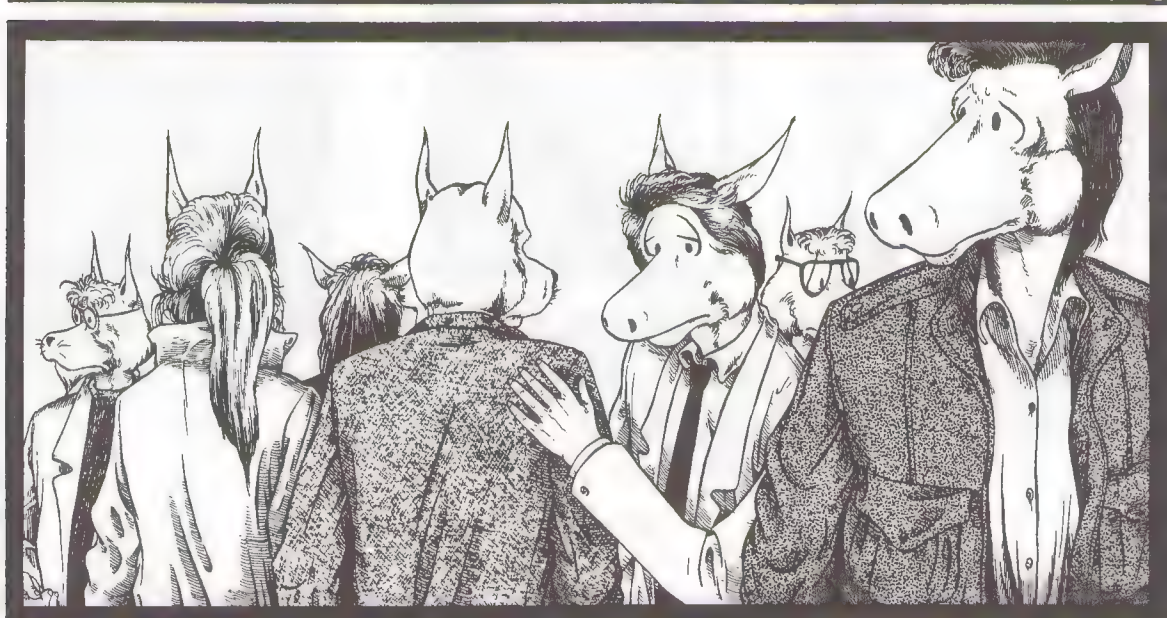


Handwritten signature or text at the bottom right corner.









CHAPTER III

Faces & Traces



KLIK

HEY, THIS IS ARNIE! DON'T YOU JUST HATE THESE MACHINES? WELL, LEAVE ME A MESSAGE ANYWAY AND I'LL GET BACK TO YOU.

BRRING
BRRING

BEEBEEP

HEY, ARN!
IT'S GUNTHER!
YOU HOME?

WAKE UP,
LAZY-ASS!

OKAY, WELL, MAYBE YOU'RE NOT HOME. I WAS JUST CALLING TO SEE IF YOU FELT LIKE, UH, SHOOTING SOME POOL OR SOMETHING.

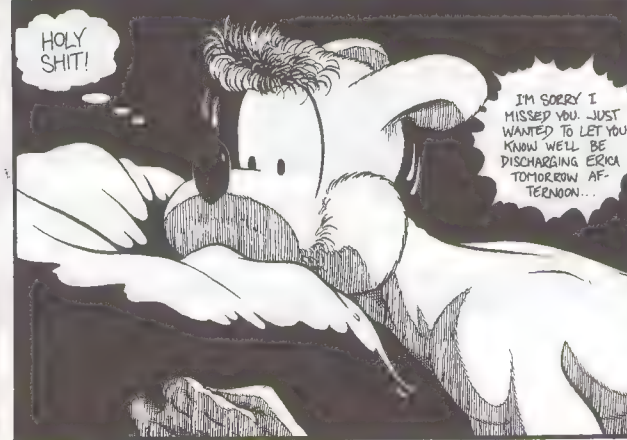
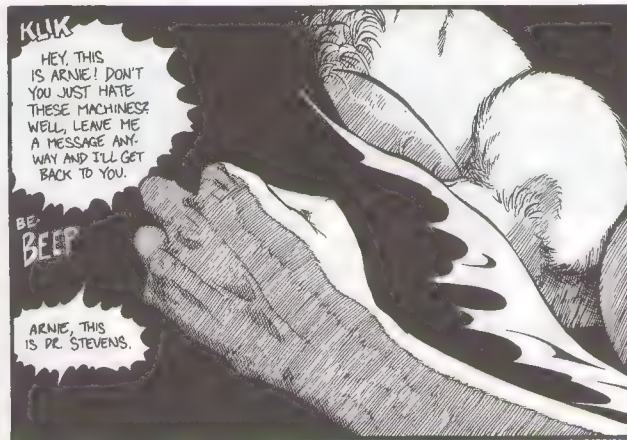
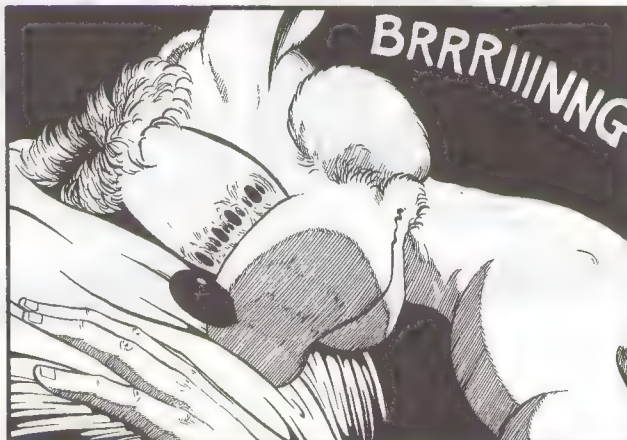
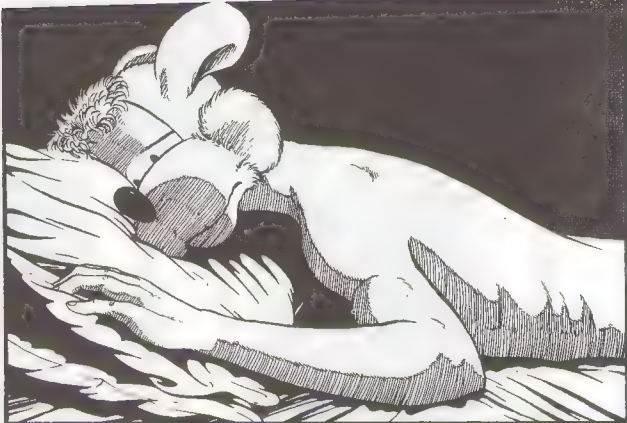
I'VE BEEN KILLING MYSELF ALL DAY TRYING TO REGISTER FOR THESE GODDAMN CLASSES...

...FIGURED I COULD USE A BREAK.

SO, UH, CALL
BACK IF YOU GET A
CHANCE.....

AND, OF
COURSE, LET ME AND
JOEY KNOW HOW ERICA'S
DOING..... SEE YOU, BUD.

KLA-KLIK



...AND I
THOUGHT YOU'D
SLEEP EASIER
KNOWING THAT
SHE'S GOING TO
BE JUST—

TROMP
TROMP
TROMP
TROMP

HELLO! HELLO,
DR. STEVENS? HI!
IT'S ARNIE. I WAS
JUST, UH, LYING
DOWN...

OH, WELL,
I DIDN'T MEAN
TO WAKE
YOU.

NO, NO, NO.
PLEASE, WAKE
ME UP! TELL ME
WHAT'S GOING
ON!

WELL, ARNIE,
THE GOOD NEWS
IS THAT THERE'S
NO BAD NEWS AF-
TER ALL.

KLIK

THE FROSTBITE
ON HER RIGHT FOOT
WASN'T AS BAD AS
WE FEARED

ERICA ISN'T
GOING TO LOSE
A SINGLE TOE.

sigh
AW, JEEZ.


THAT'S —
THAT'S A REAL
RELIEF!

HEH HEH. LISTEN,
THOUGH COULD YOU
COME BY IN THE MOR-
NING? I'VE ASKED A
COLLEAGUE TO LOOK
AT ERICA'S CASE...

...AND I'D
LIKE YOU TO
MEET HER.


UH, SURE.

WHAT KIND OF
COLLEAGUE?



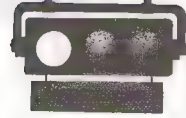
IS THIS REALLY
NECESSARY? I MEAN,
I FEEL GREAT!

WELL, THAT'S
TERRIFIC, ERICA. BUT
YOU HAD A PRETTY ROUGH
EXPERIENCE OUT ON THAT
LAKE, YOU KNOW....



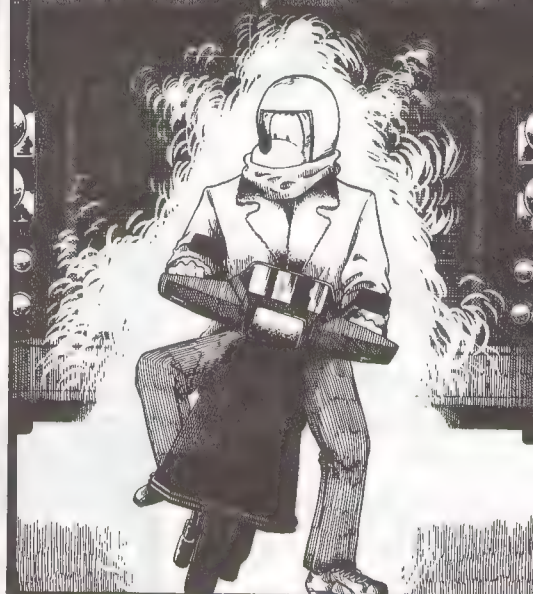
AND BE ABLE TO
ADD AN EXTRA TREAT
TO THE BILL.

WELL, YOU'RE THE
DOCTOR, DOCTOR.



...AND SOMETIMES TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES CAN AFFECT PEOPLE IN WAYS THEY AREN'T AWARE OF.

IT'S JUST PROCEDURE. WE WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE OKAY PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY BEFORE WE TURN YOU LOOSE.



HEH, HEH. THIS WON'T TAKE MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES...

WHAT I'VE GOT IS A STACK OF PICTURES... DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS...

AND I'D LIKE YOU TO LOOK AT THEM...

...AND TELL ME A KIND OF STORY, ABOUT WHAT YOU THINK IS GOING ON IN EACH PICTURE.

ARE YOU SURE THIS IS ALL JUST PROCEDURE?

OKAY, OKAY. A STORY, HUM?

WELL, THERE'S A GIRL AND... AN OLDER WOMAN NEXT TO HER... HER MOM, I GUESS.

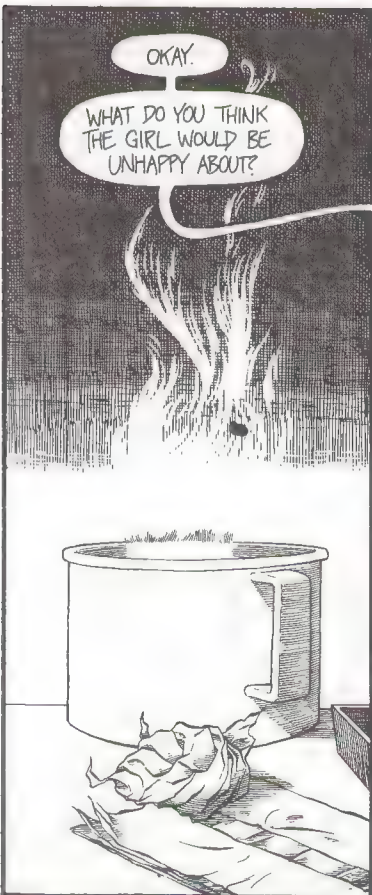
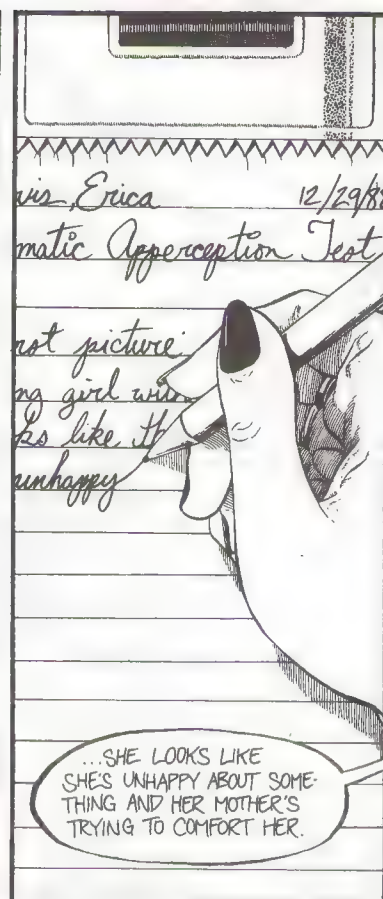
THE WOMAN IS THE GIRL'S MOTHER.

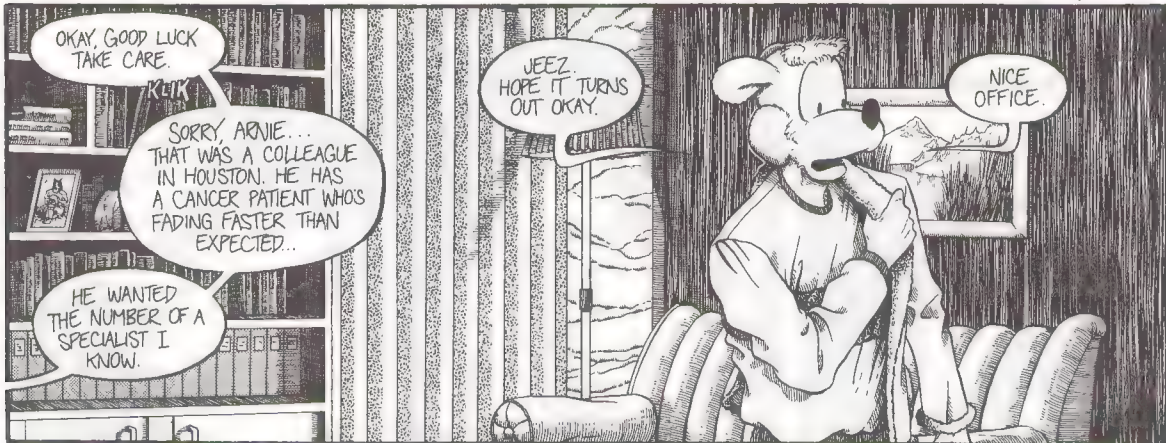
RIGHT.

HOW OLD WOULD YOU SAY THE GIRL IS?

ABOUT... OOH...

ABOUT 16 OR SO.





WELL, MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME. I'VE GOT TO LOOK IN ON A FEW PEOPLE, THEN I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

WOULD YOU LIKE A CUP OF COFFEE OR SOMETHING?

OH, NO THANKS.

APPRECIATE IT, THOUGH.

KA-
KLUNK

TAK
TAK
TAK

MOVIES - ART FRAGIST

SCOTT
HAWKES

THE
HUMAN
CONDITION

THE
HUMAN
CONDITION

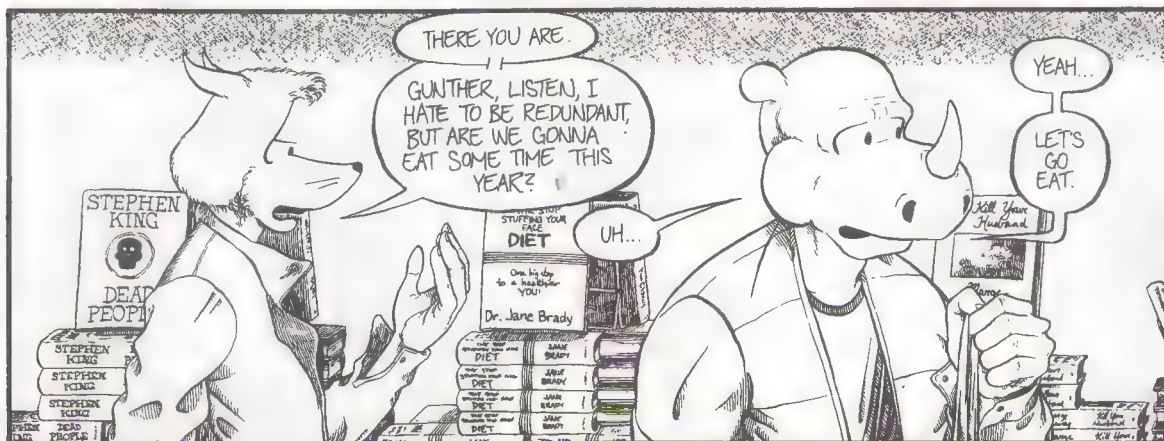
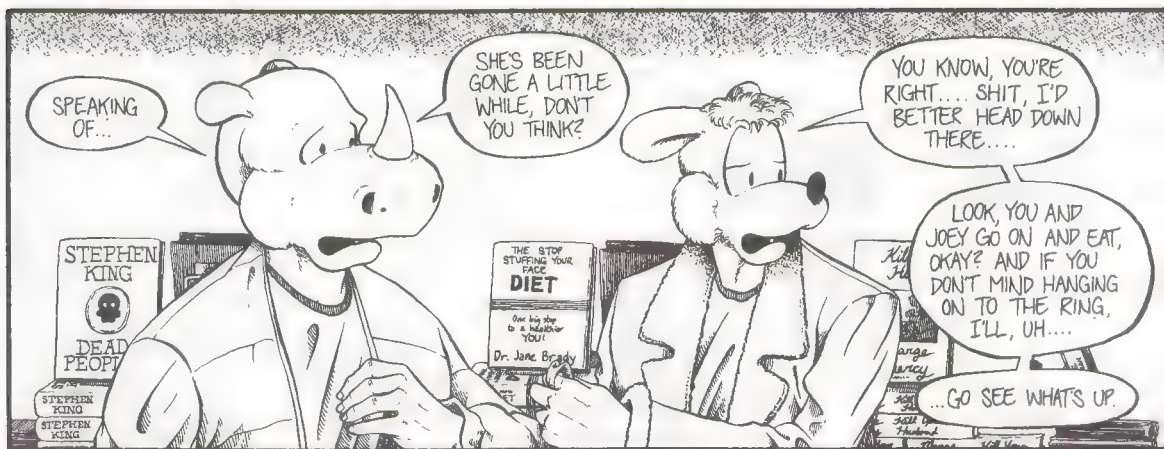
THE
HUMAN
CONDITION

THE
HUMAN
CONDITION

THE
HUMAN
CONDITION

THE
HUMAN
CONDITION

THE
HUMAN
CONDITION





JESUS CHRIST, ERICA...
YOU STUPID BITCH...

WHY DID YOU RUN
LIKE THAT? WHAT IF HE
SAW YOU...?

...FOLLOWED YOU?

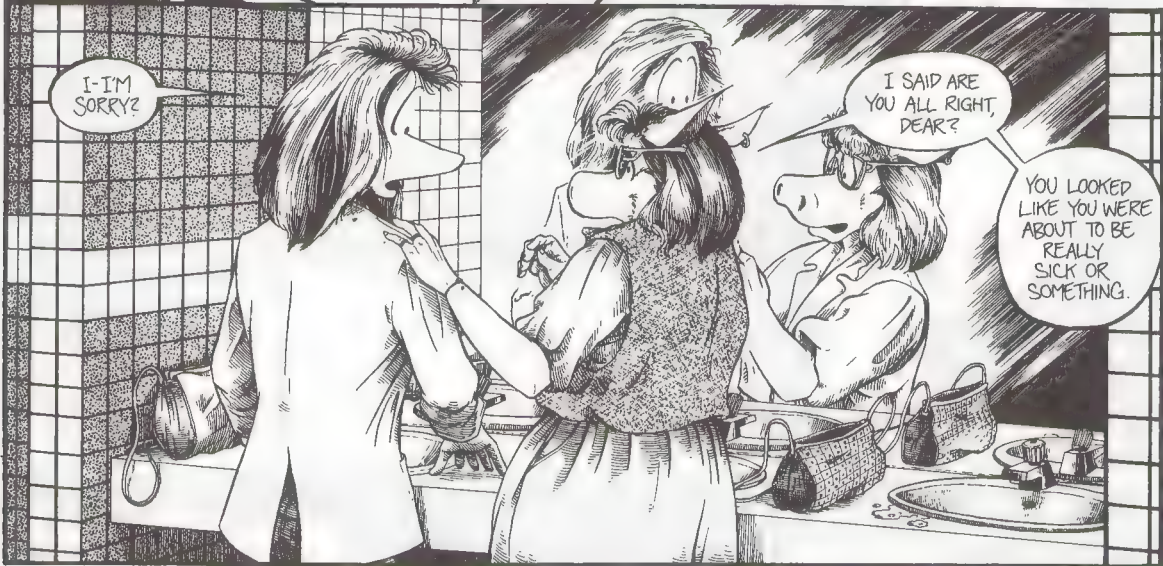
SHOULDA STAYED
WITH THE GUYS.

WHAT IF HE KNOWS

EXACTLY

WHERE
YOU ARE?

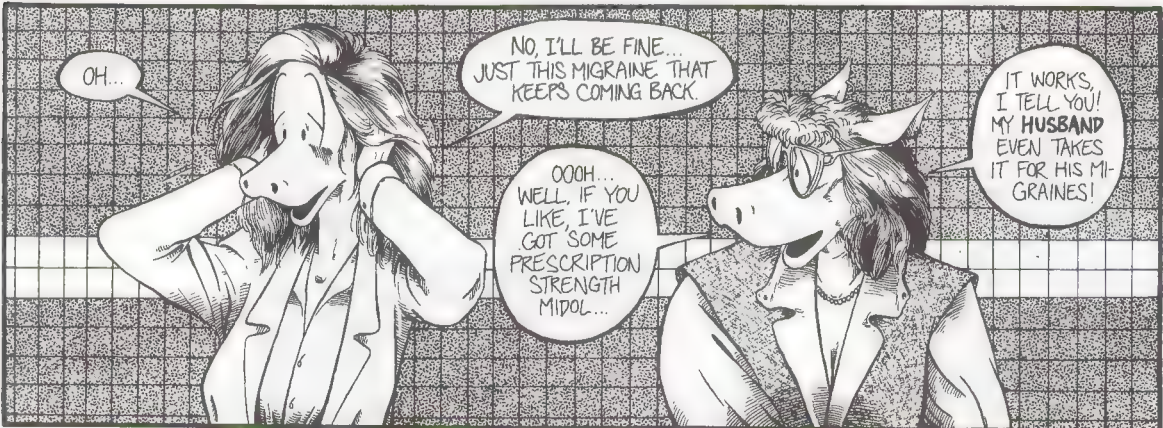
10/10/97



I-I'M
SORRY?

I SAID ARE
YOU ALL RIGHT,
DEAR?

YOU LOOKED
LIKE YOU WERE
ABOUT TO BE
REALLY
SICK OR
SOMETHING.



OH...

NO, I'LL BE FINE...
JUST THIS MIGRAINE THAT
KEEPS COMING BACK.

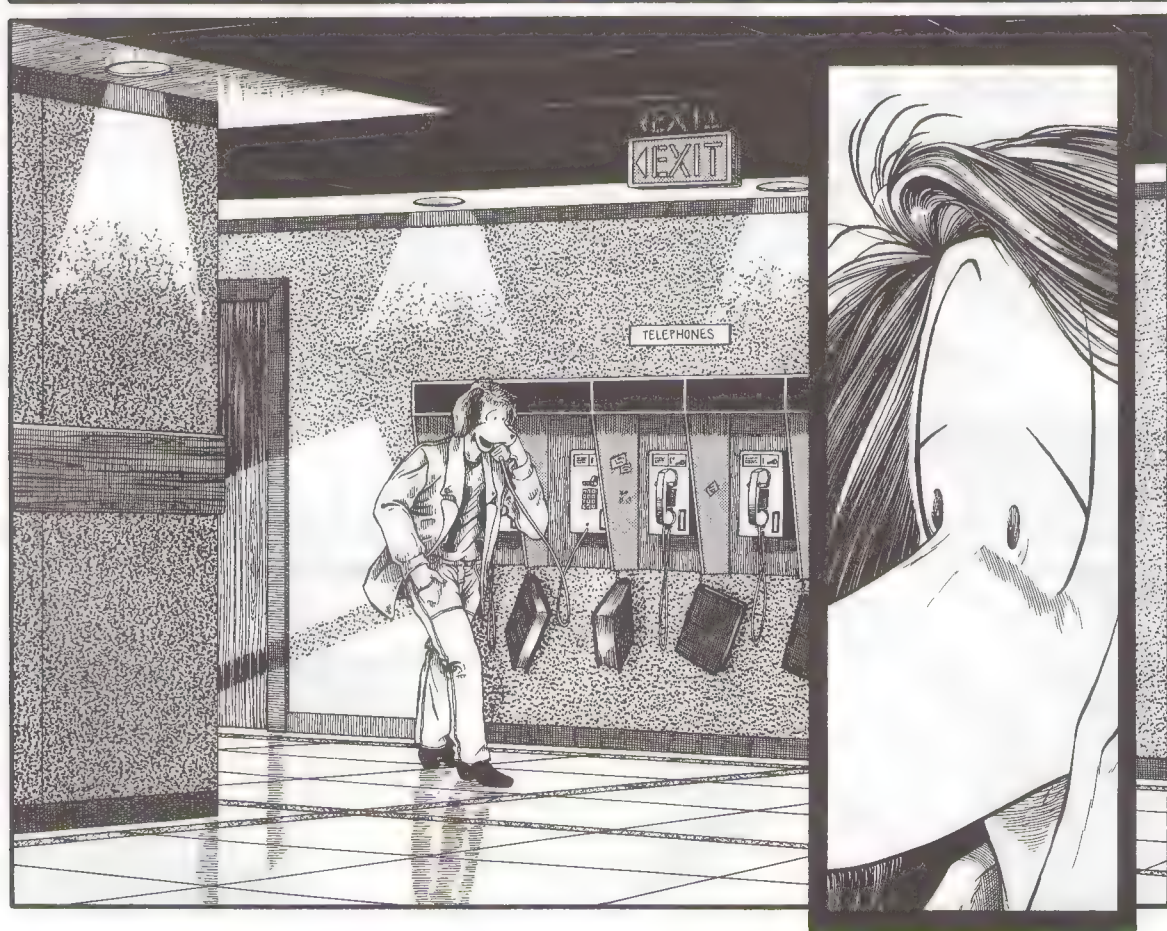
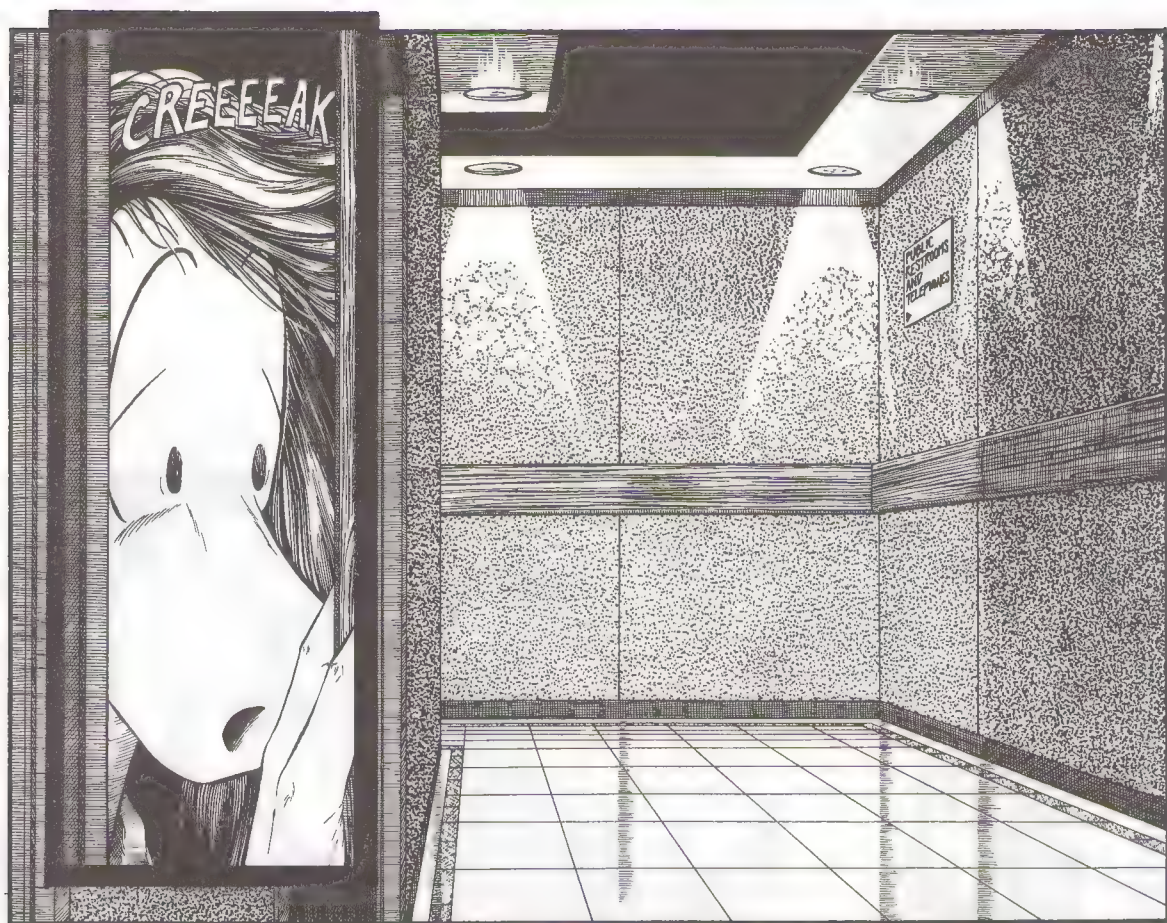
OOOH...
WELL, IF YOU
LIKE, I'VE
GOT 'SOME
PRESCRIPTION
STRENGTH
MIDOL...

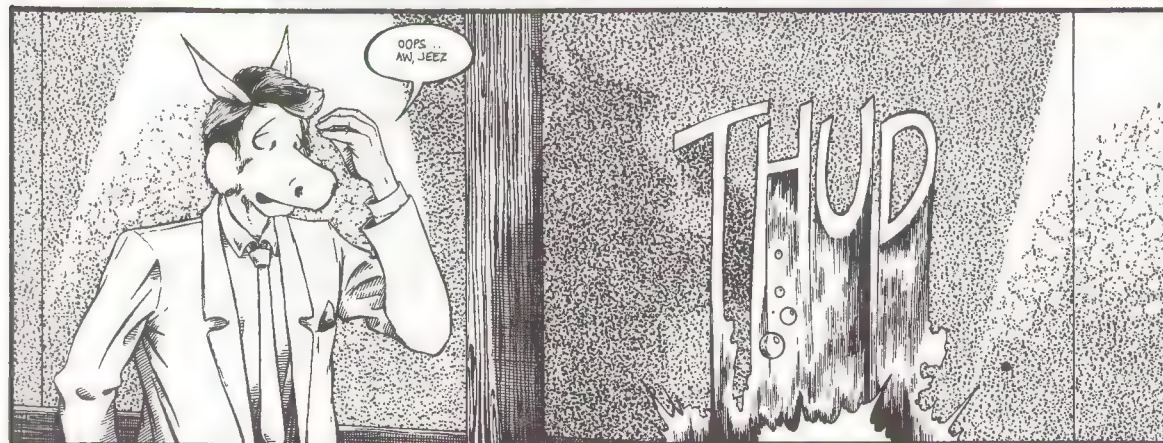
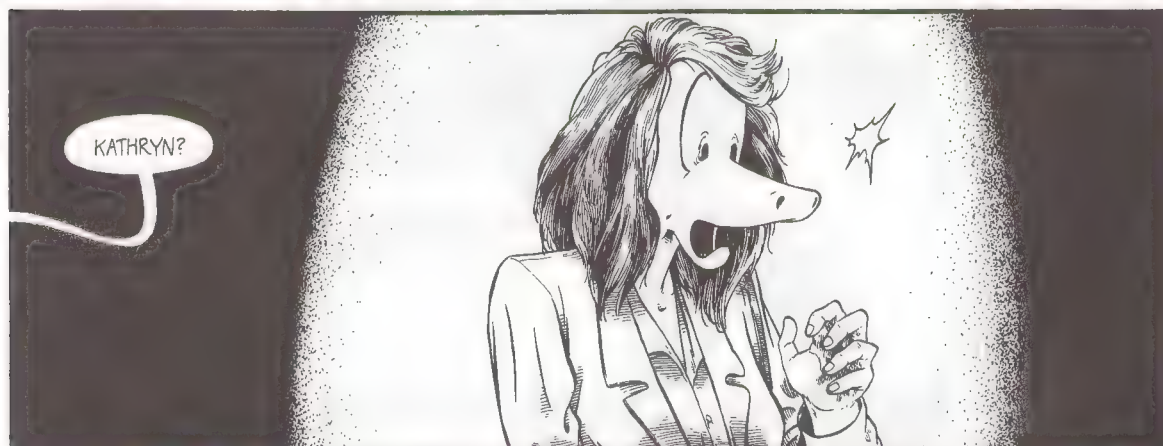
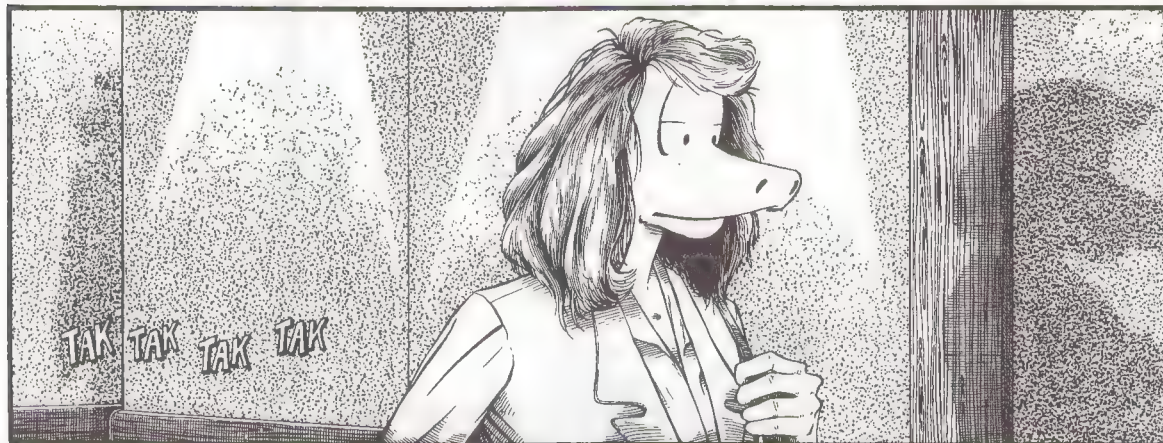
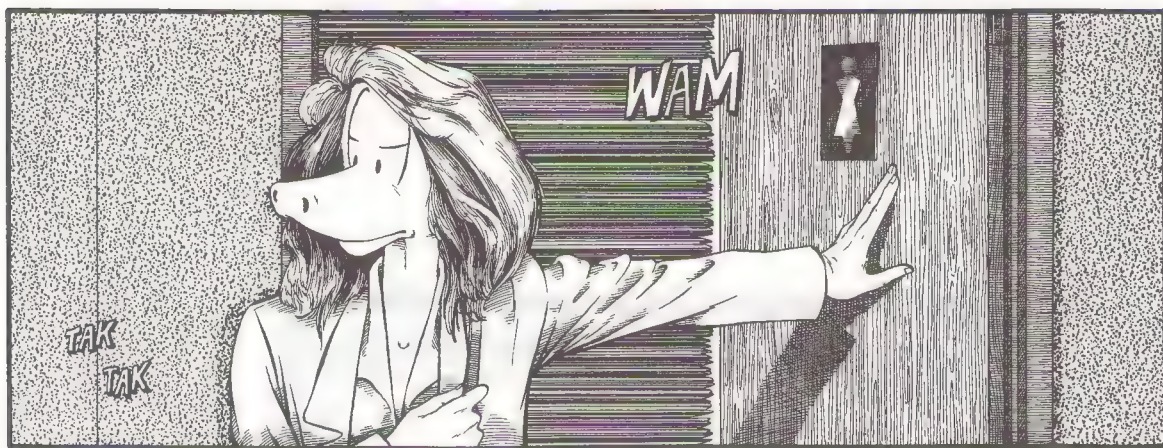
IT WORKS,
I TELL YOU!
MY **HUSBAND**
EVEN TAKES
IT FOR HIS MI-
GRAINES!



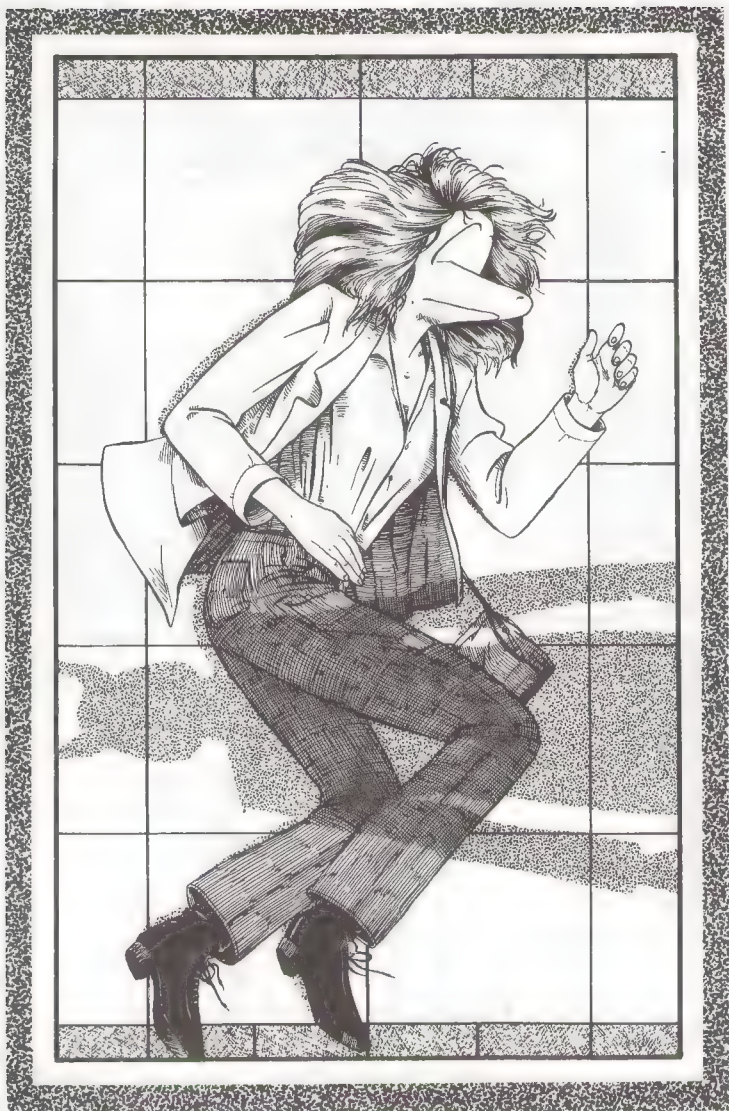
NO...NO...THANK
YOU, THOUGH.

OKAY, SUIT
YOURSELF.
I'M TELLING YOU,
I MAY HAVE ME A
HEADACHE BEFORE
ALL THIS SHOPPING
IS DONE...



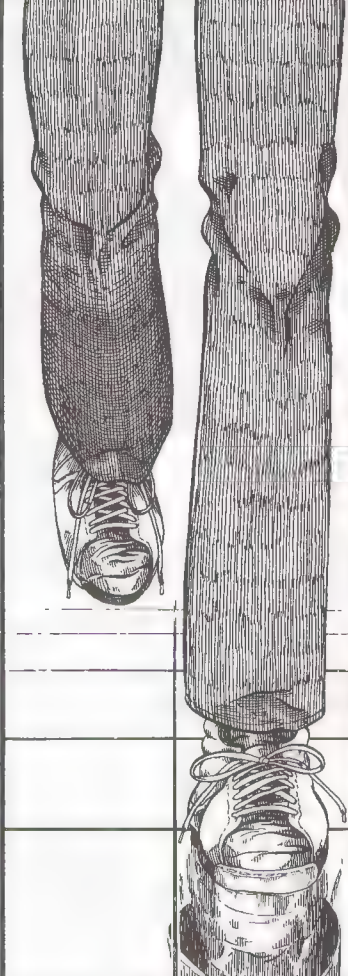


OH MY
GOODNESS!

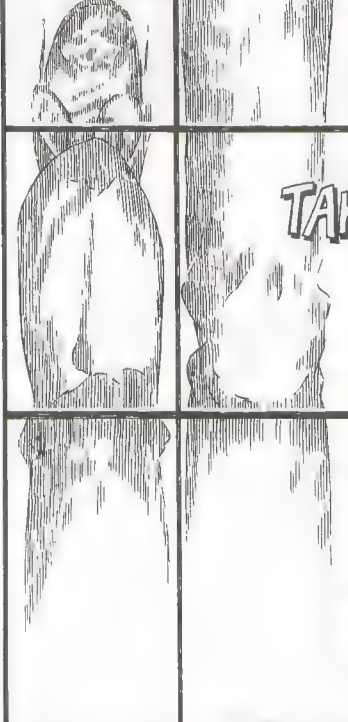


SHE'LL BE ALL
RIGHT—SHE'S JUST FAINTED.
SHE HASN'T BEEN FEELING
WELL LATELY.

I JUST NEED TO
TAKE HER HOME AND
PUT HER TO BED.



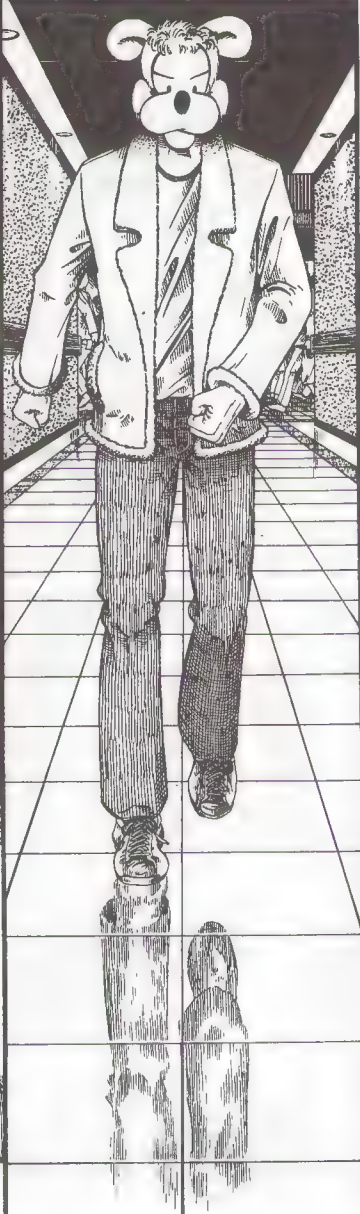
TAK



TAK

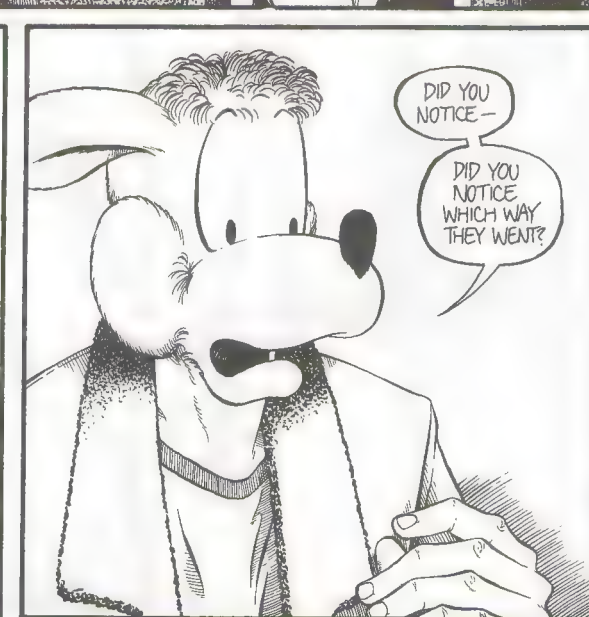
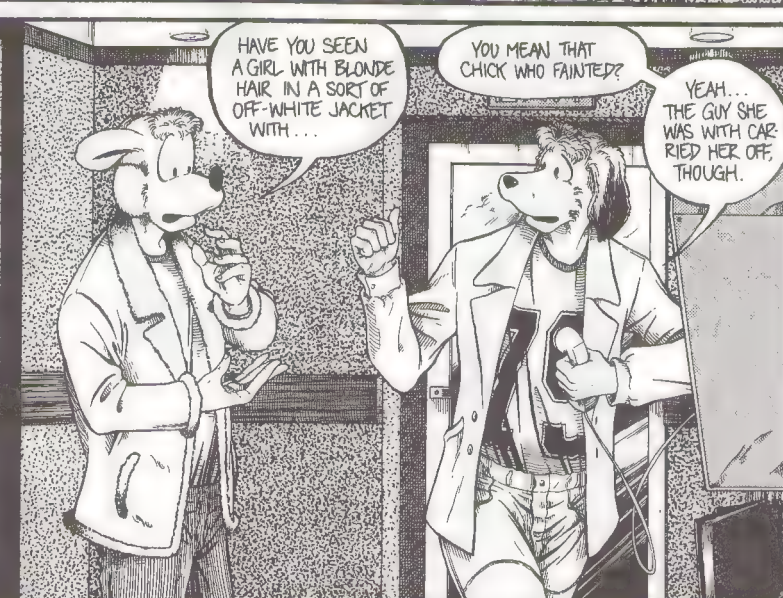
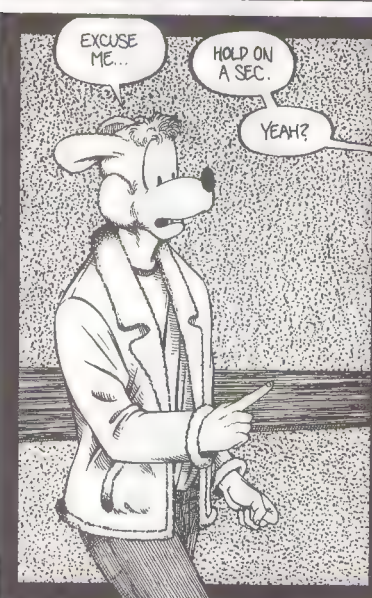


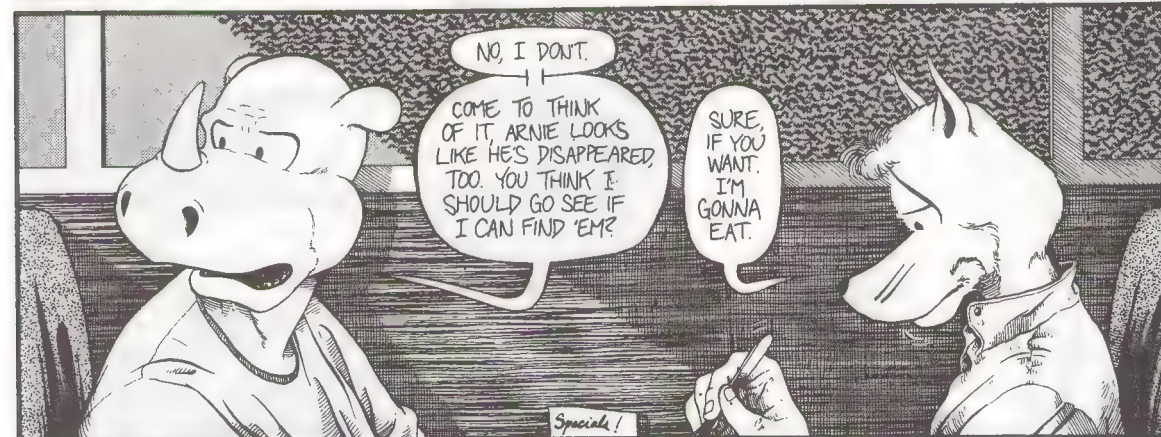
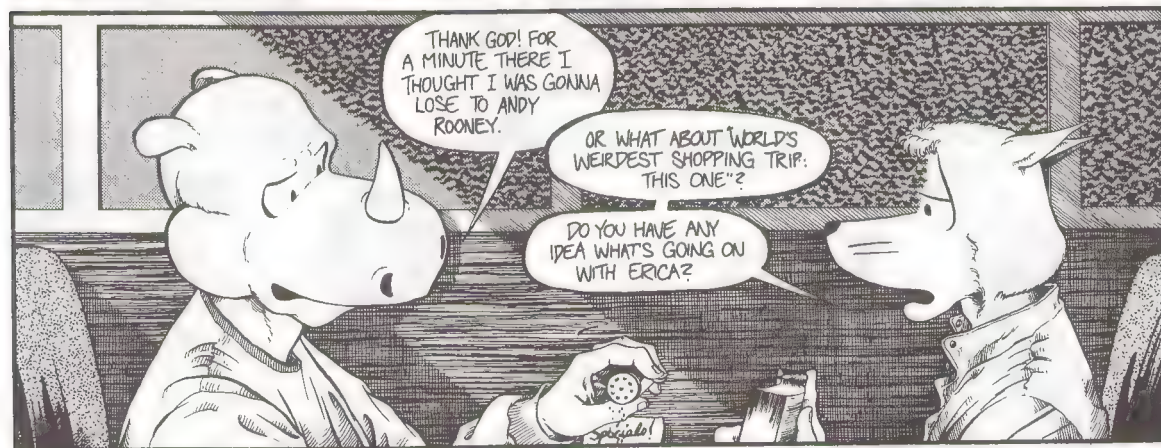
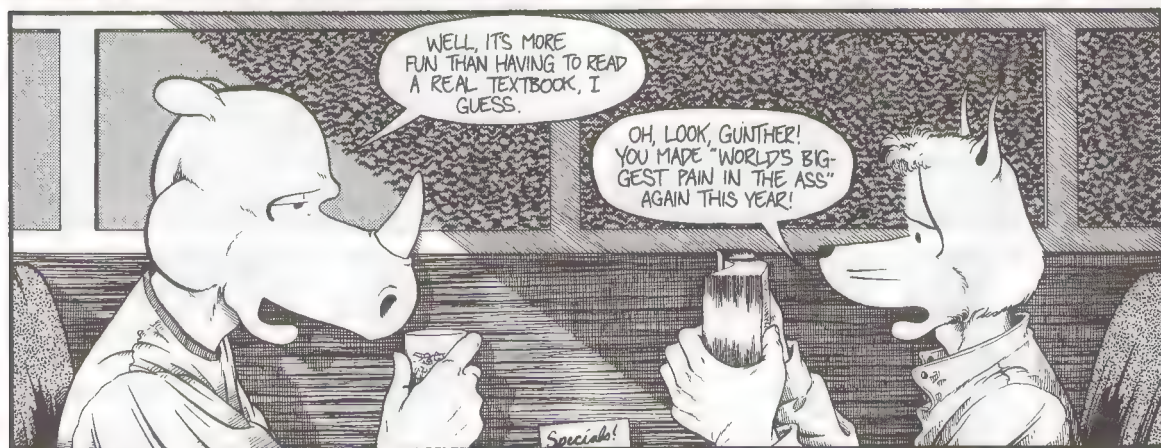
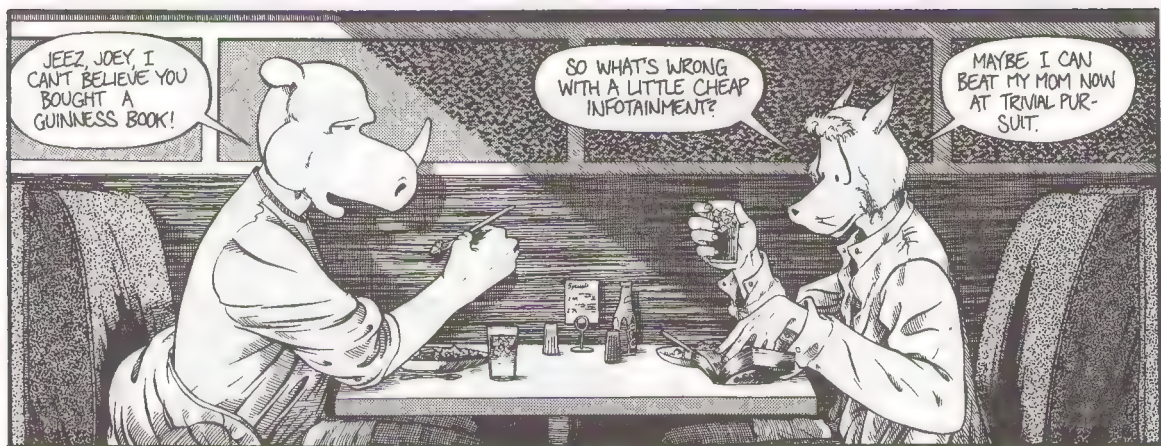
TAK

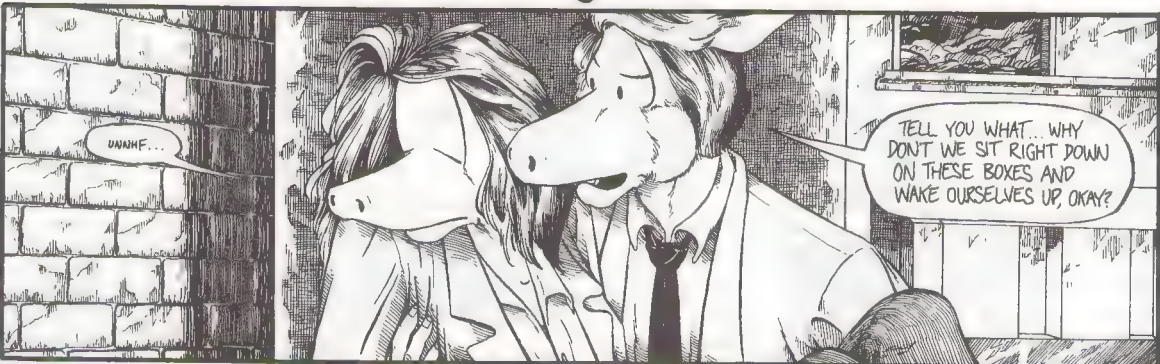
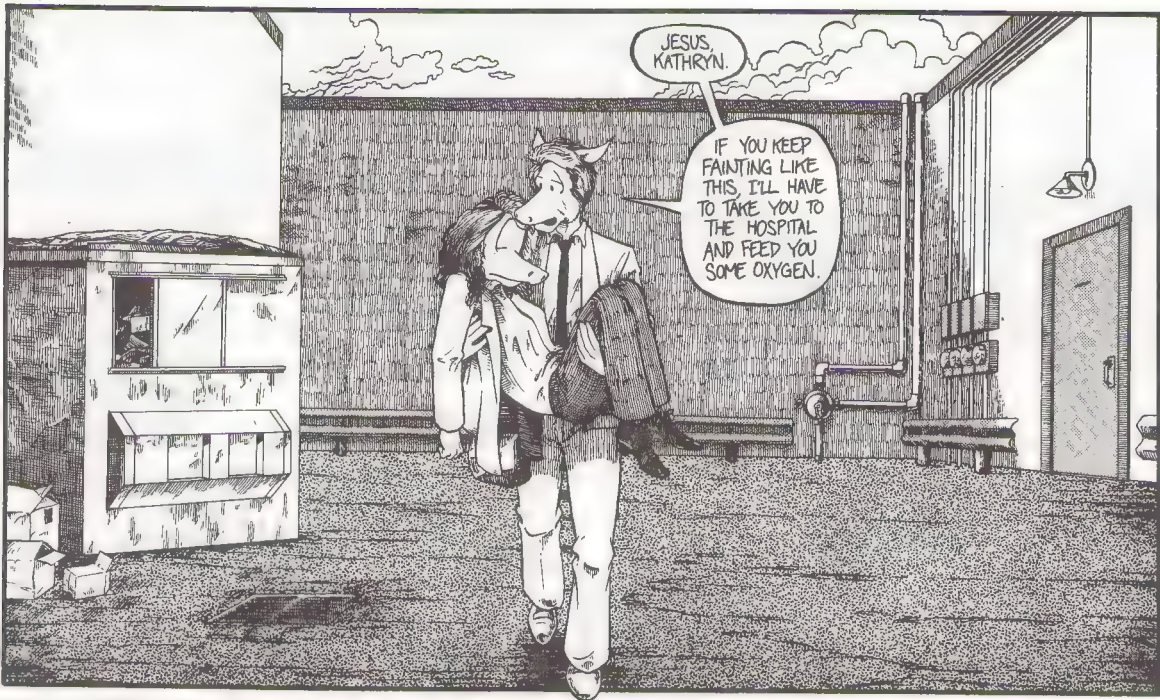


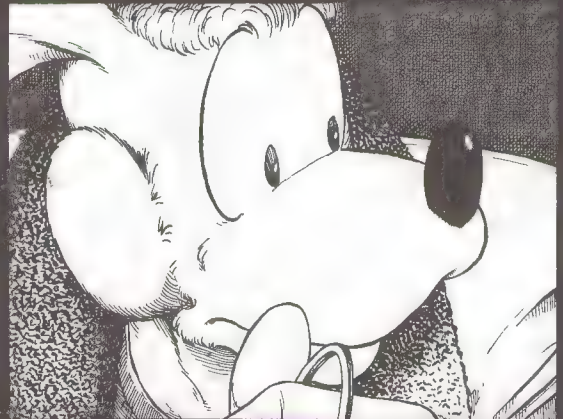
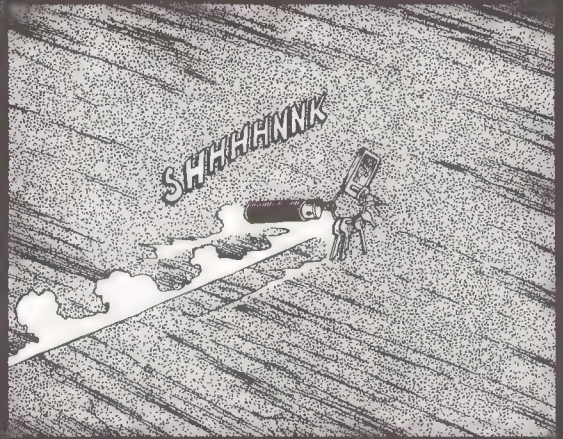
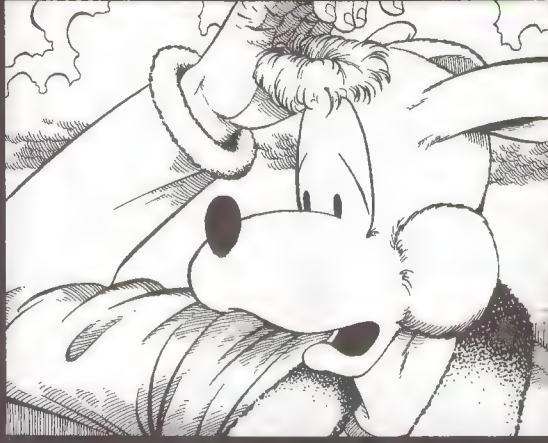
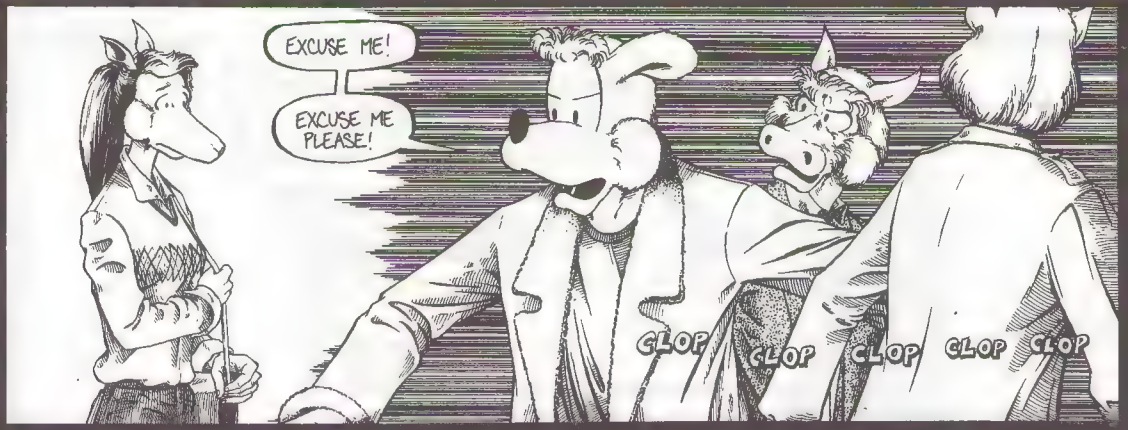
TAK

TAK









SERVICE DRIVE—NO UNAUTHORIZED VEHICLES

CLEARANCE 17' 3"

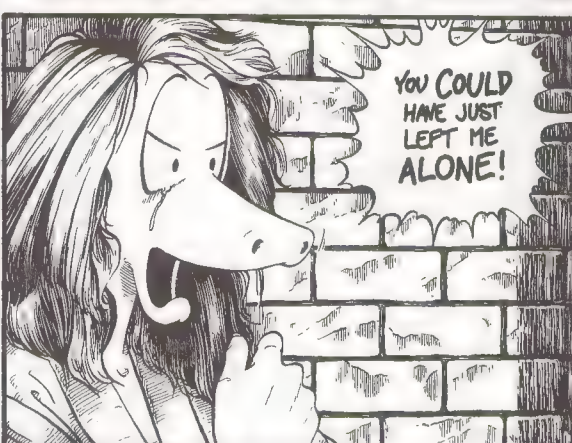


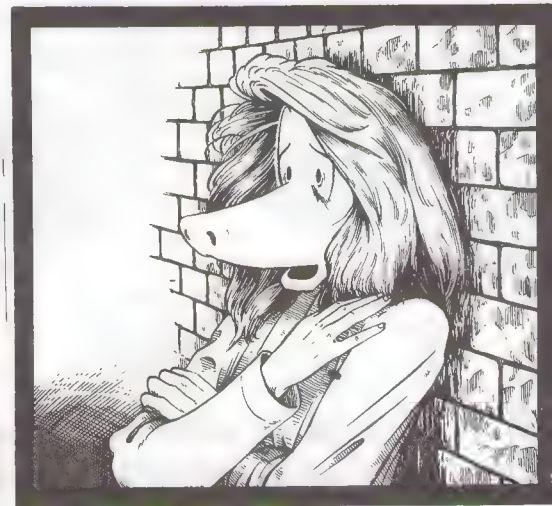
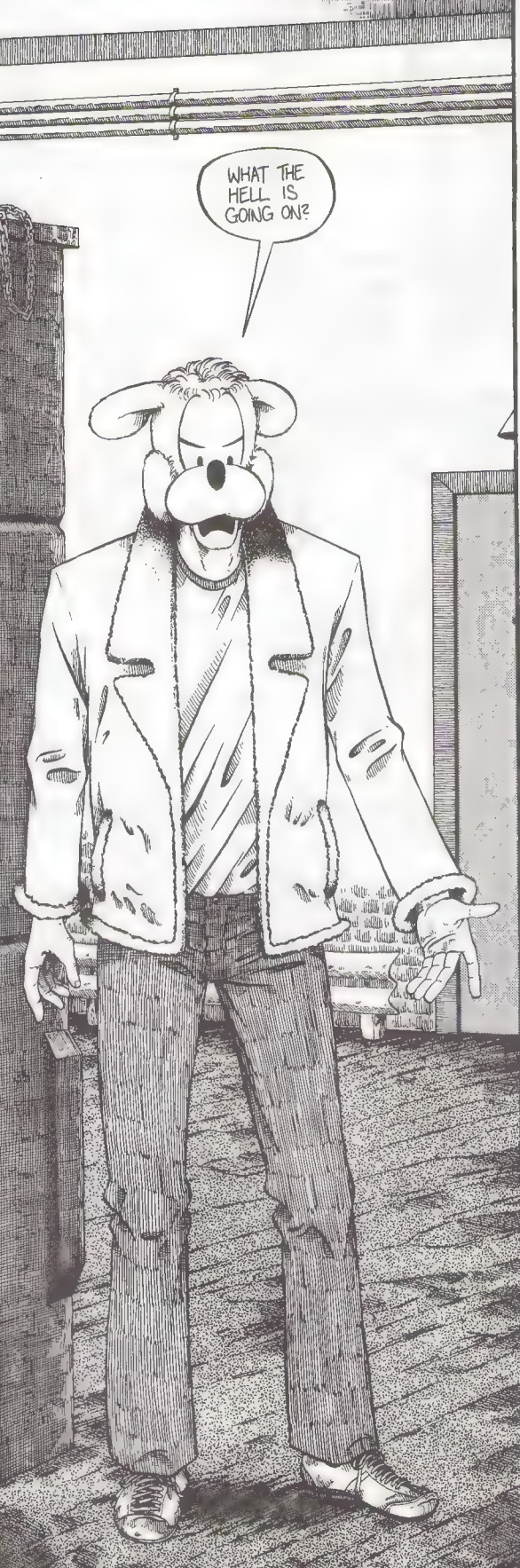
NOW...

HOW DID
YOU FIND ME?

HEH. WELL, YOU
DIDN'T MAKE IT EASY.

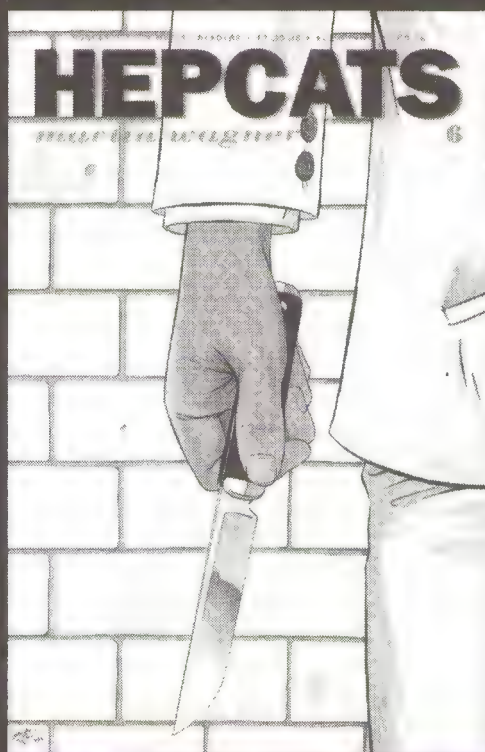
W-W-WHERE ARE WE?
WHAT ARE WE DOING BACK
HERE?





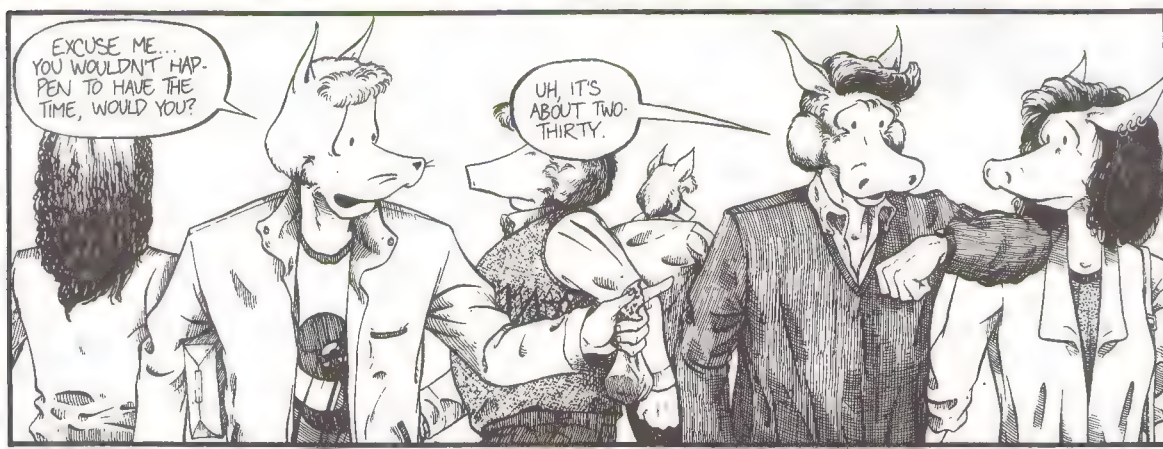
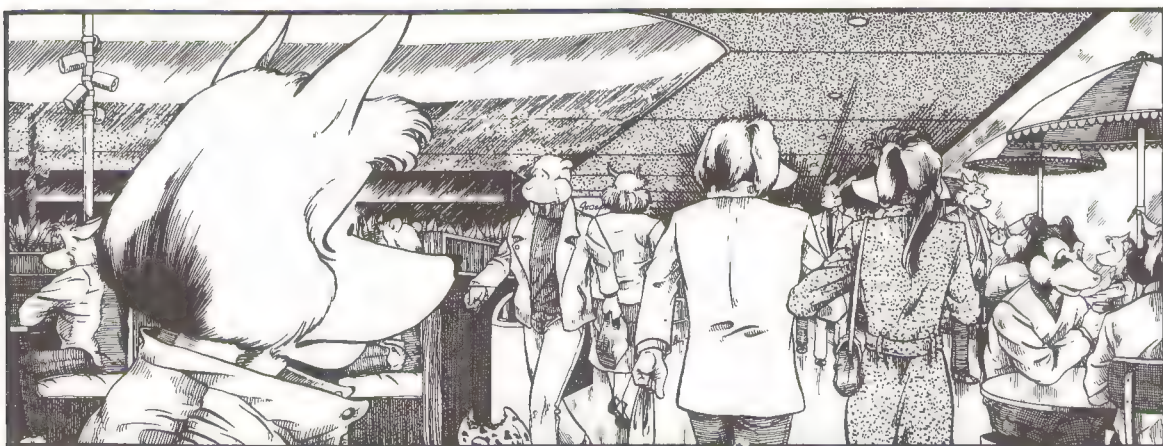
CHAPTER IV

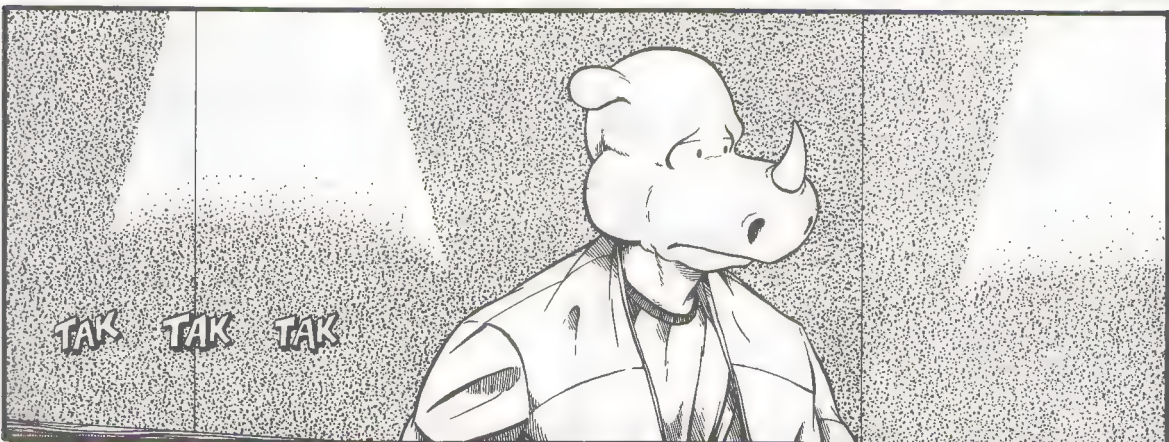
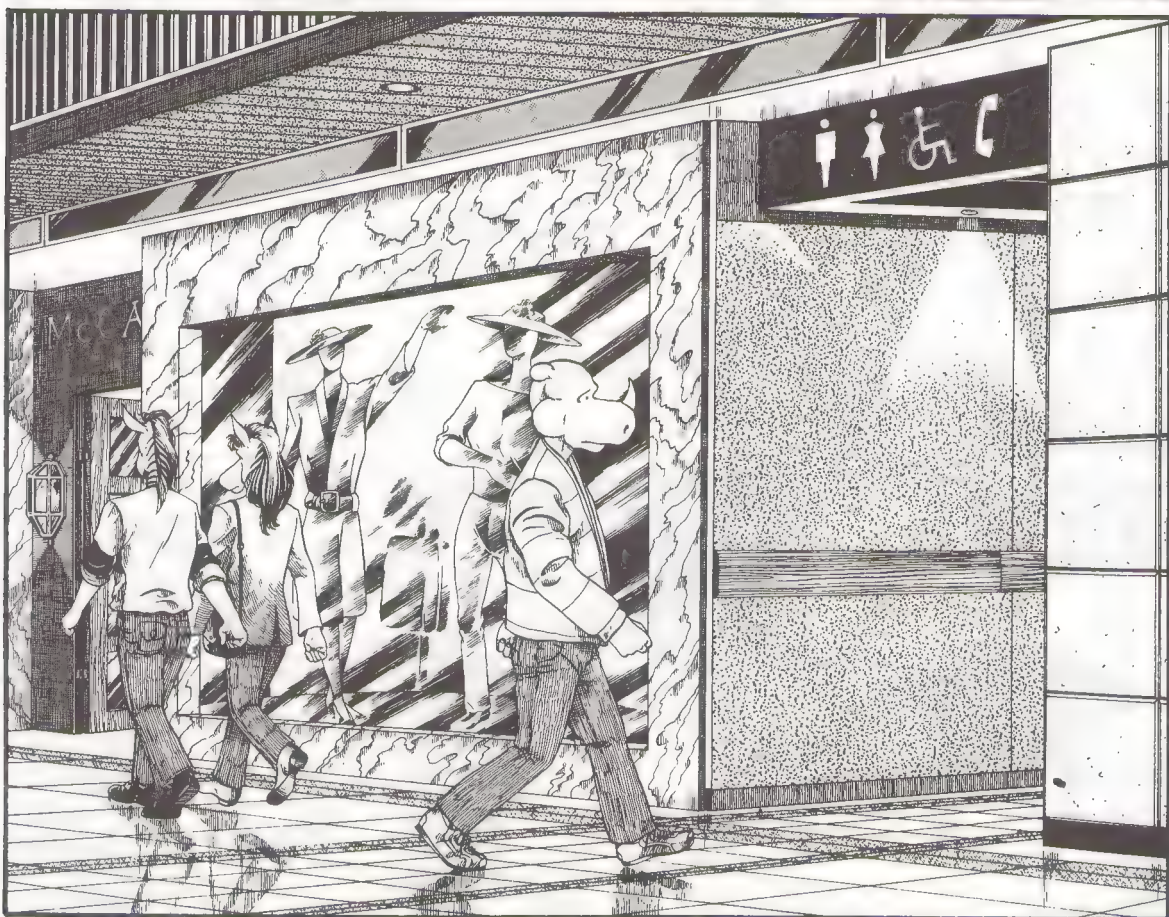
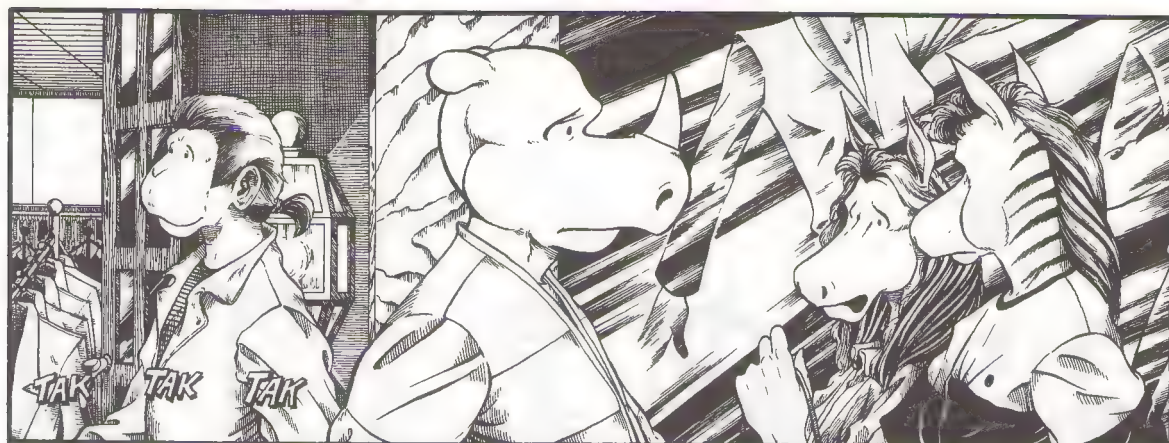
Straight, No Chaser



...AND SIXTY-
THREE CENTS
IS YOUR CHANGE.
THANKS A
LOT!







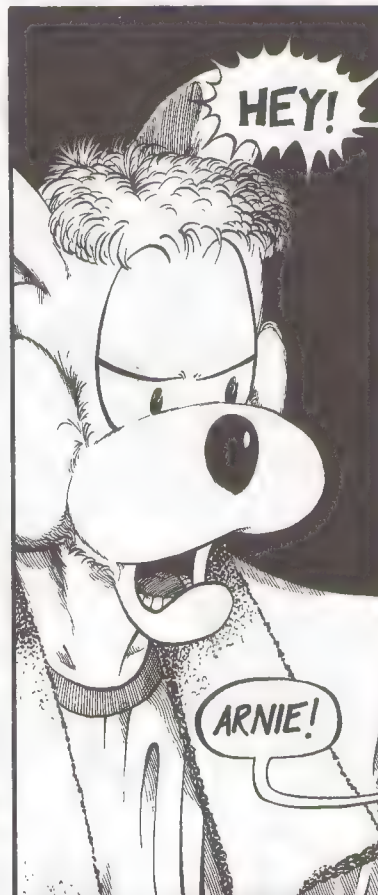
I SAID
WHAT'S GOING
ON?



BOYFRIEND?



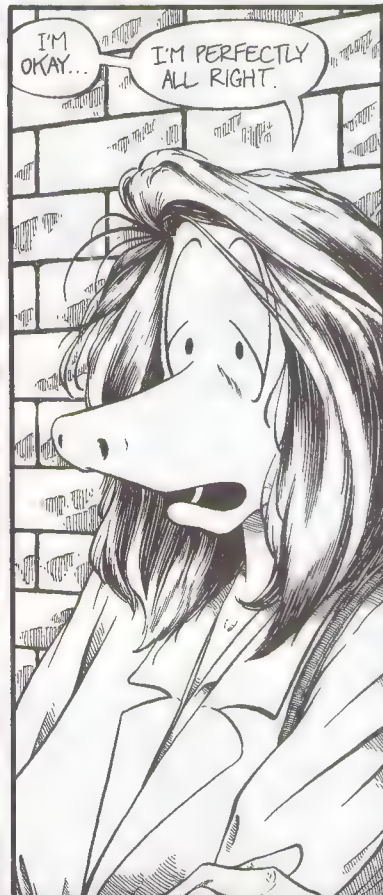
HEY!



ARNIE!

I'M
OKAY...

I'M PERFECTLY
ALL RIGHT.



LOOK, I KNOW THIS LOOKS BAD, BUT I...

YOU'RE GODDAMN
RIGHT THIS LOOKS BAD,
MISTER. ERICA...
YOU'RE SURE YOU'RE
NOT HURT, BABY?

NO, REALLY, I'M
FINE. I REALLY AM.

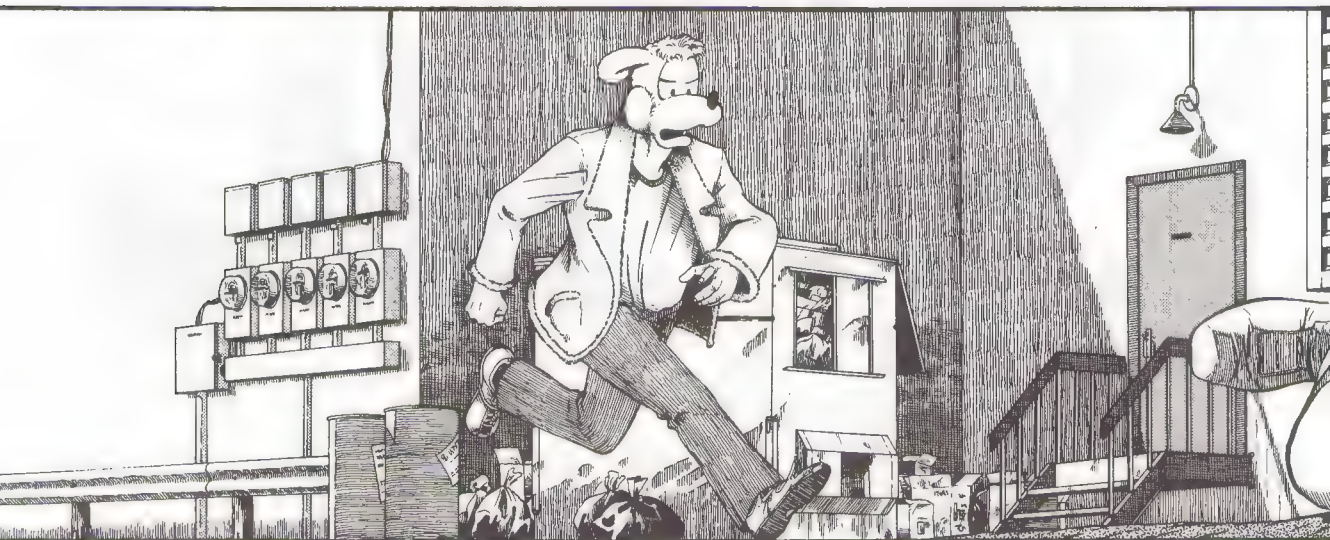
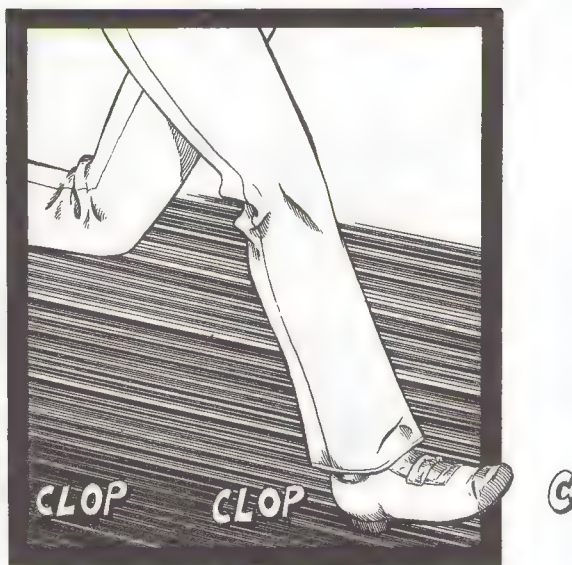
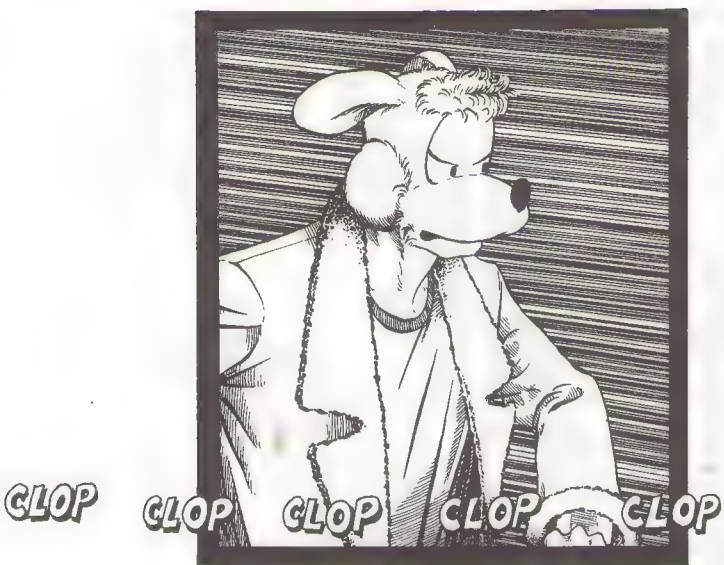
SWEETHEART,
WOULD YOU GO BACK
TO WHERE THE PAY-
PHONES WERE AND
CALL THE PO—

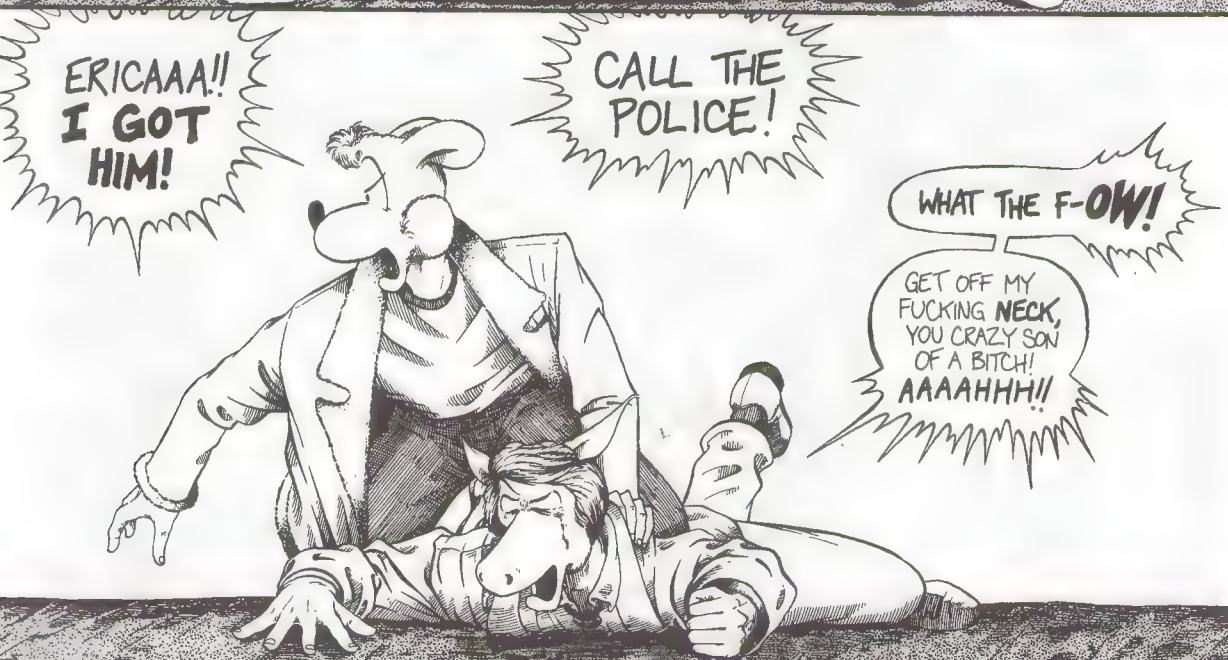
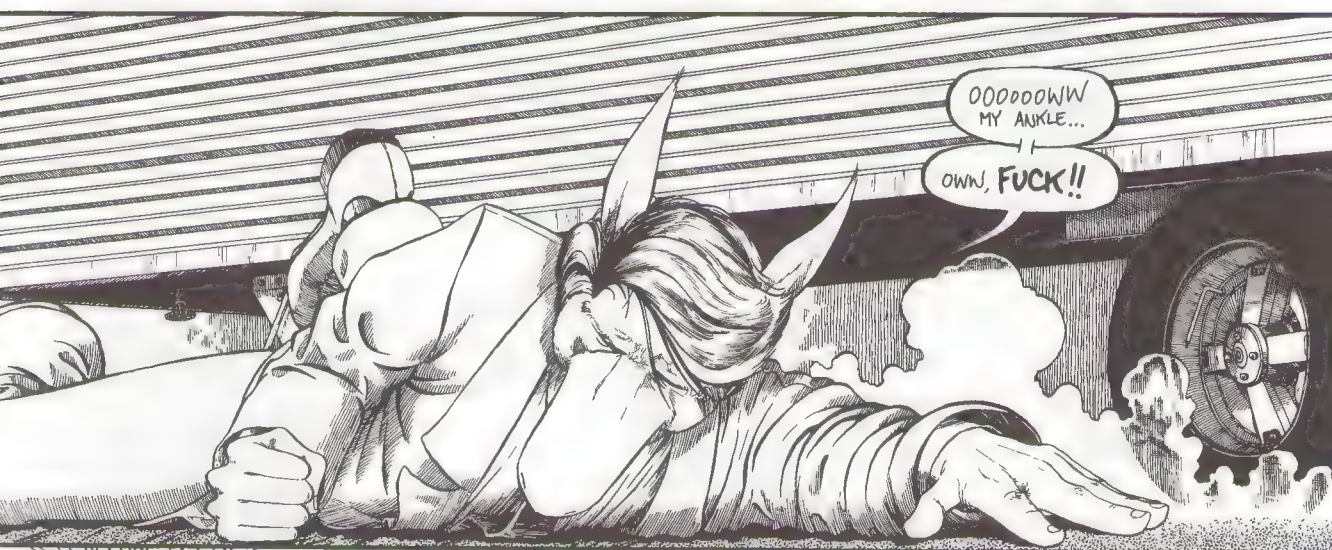
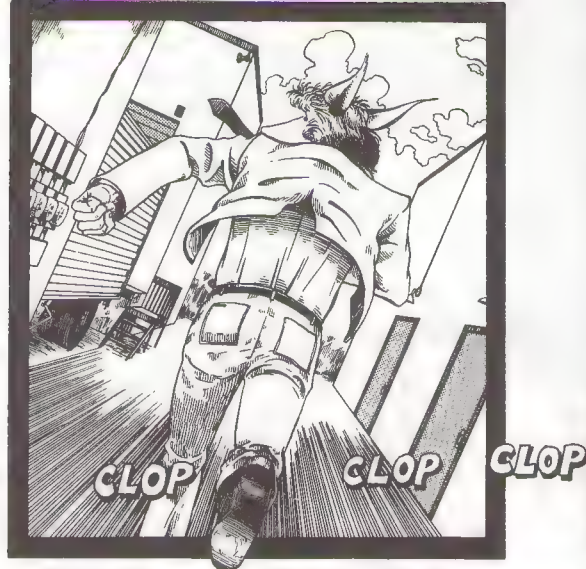
HEY! HEY,
GODDAMN IT! ARNIE!
DON'T!
LET'S
JUST GO
HOME!

SHHHHHIT....

CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP

CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP





EXCUSE ME...

AH, SHIT.

JUST A SECOND, OKAY?

GOOD MORNING
WANNABE
7-77-77

YEAH?

HEY, SORRY TO BOTHER YOU. YOU DIDN'T HAPPEN TO SEE A GUY IN A HEAVY DARK BROWN COAT WITH...

YOU MEAN THE GUY WHO WAS LOOKIN FOR THE CHICK WHO WAS CARRIED OFF BY THE OTHER GUY?

UH, YEAH, I GUESS.

THEY'RE OUT-SIDE. IS SOMETHING GOING ON OR WHAT?

THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE TO KNOW. I'M STARTING TO GET KIND OF WO...

STAY



ALL RIGHT, QUIT MOVIN' AROUND. LET'S SIT RIGHT HERE AND WAIT FOR THE POLICE.

YEAH, WHATEVER. WOULD YOU MIND LETTING ME SIT UP? YOU'RE CRUSHING MY RIB CAGE!

NOT TO MENTION MY ANKLES PROBABLY BROKEN.



MM-HMM. NO, I THINK WE CAN WAIT JUST FINE THE WAY WE ARE.

LOOK-**oof** WILL YOU KNOCK OFF THE DON JOHNSON ROUTINE AND LET ME SIT UP AND RUB MY ANKLE?

// I MEAN IT REALLY FUCKIN' HURTS!



WELL... OKAY, JUST...

OKAY.

ooooooooooooHH, GOD!

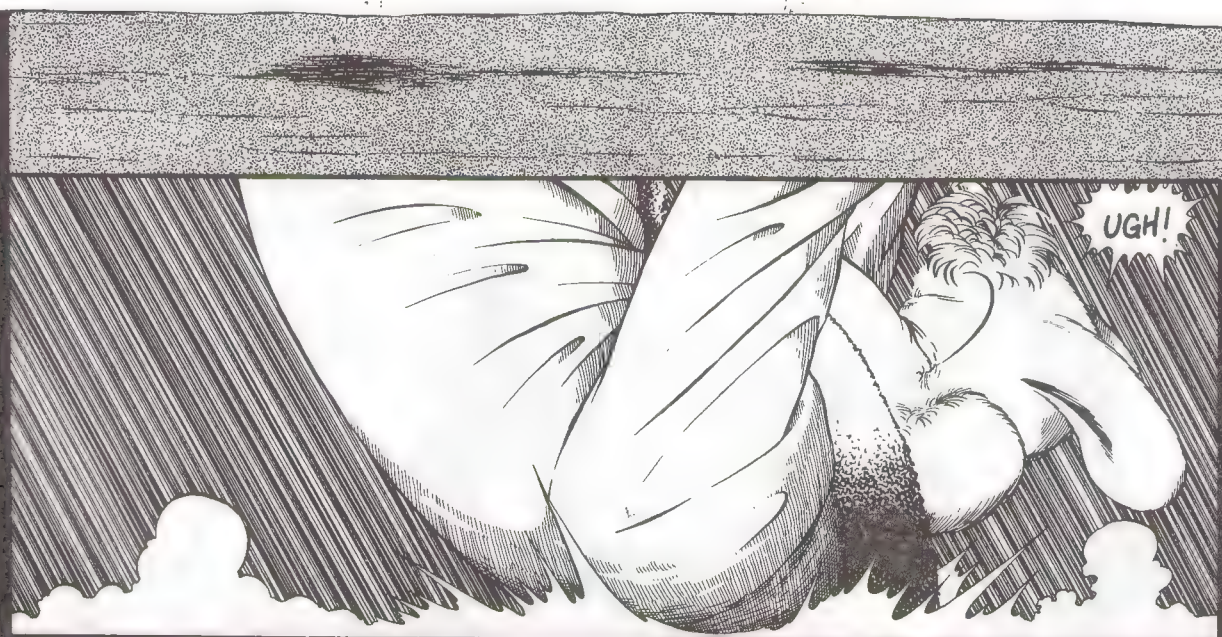
OOOHH.

sigh THAT'S STARTING TO FEEL BETTER ALREADY.

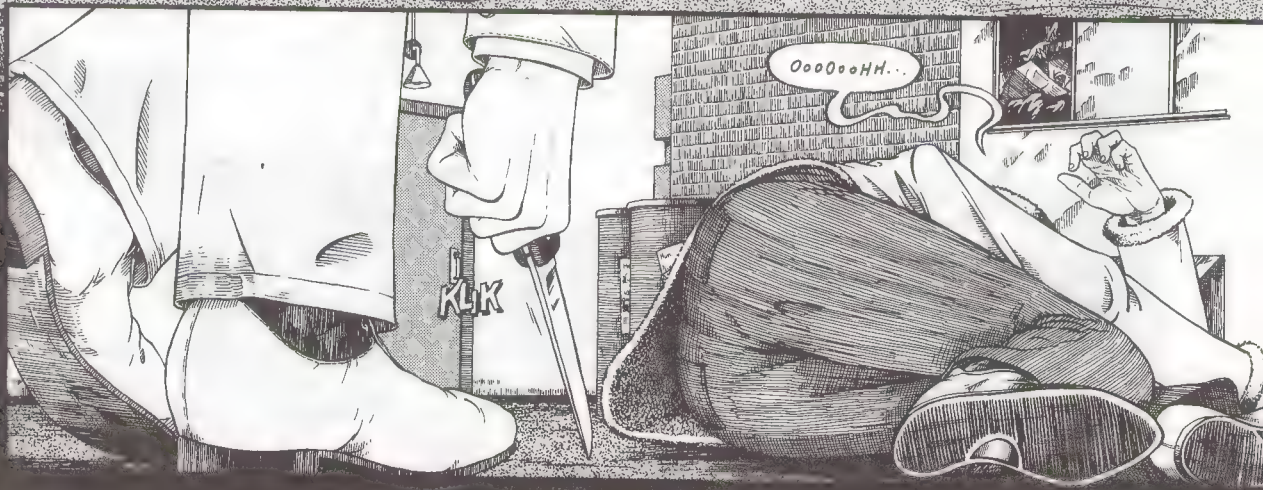


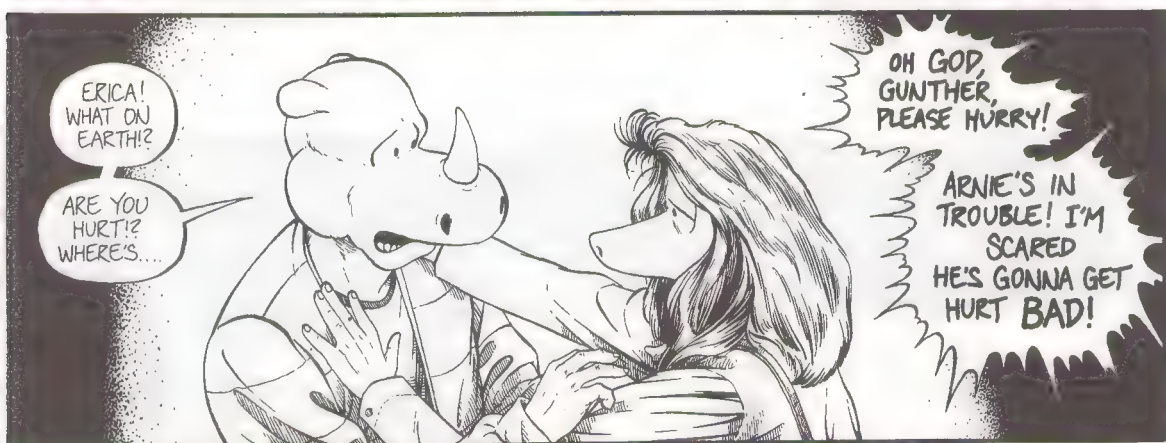
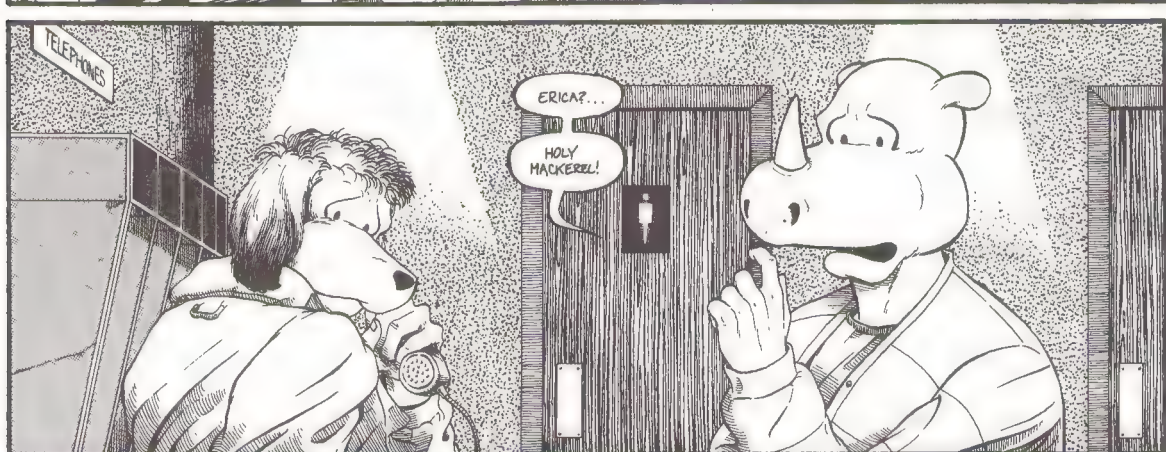
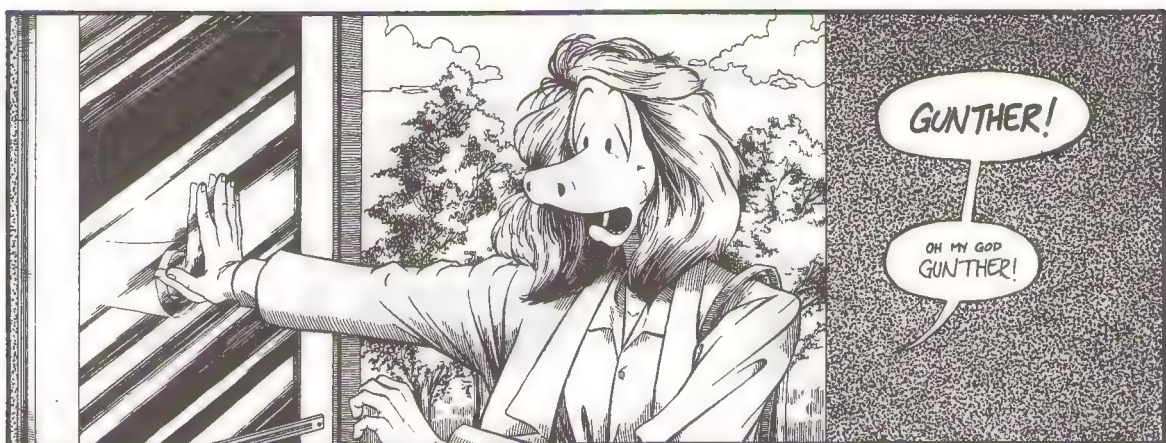
WELL, I GUESS IT ISN'T BROKEN AFTER ALL, THEN, IS IT?

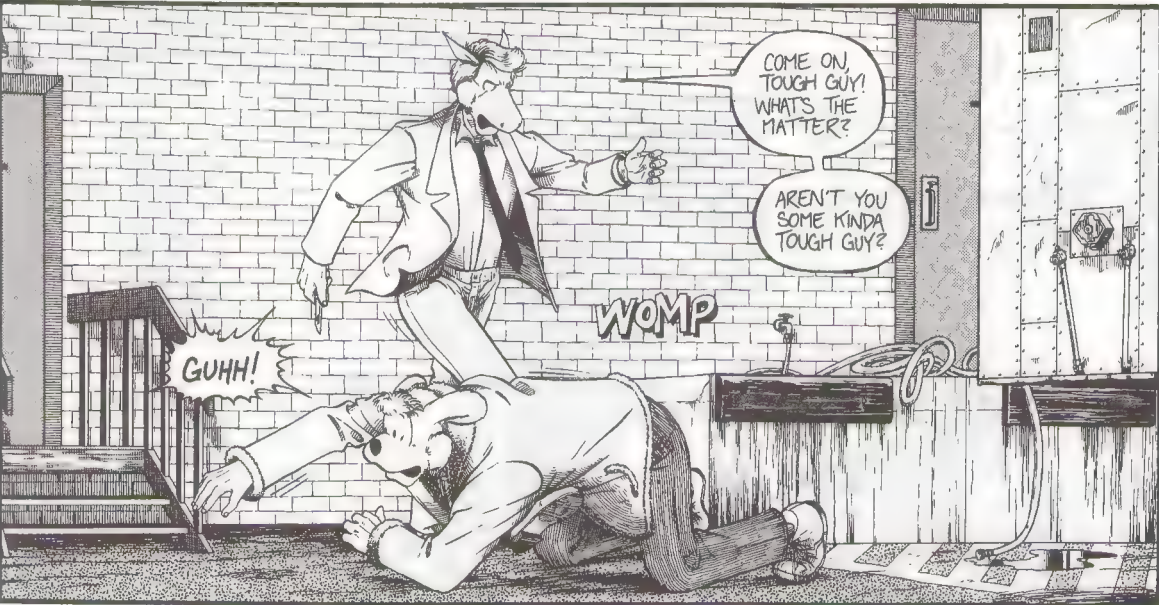
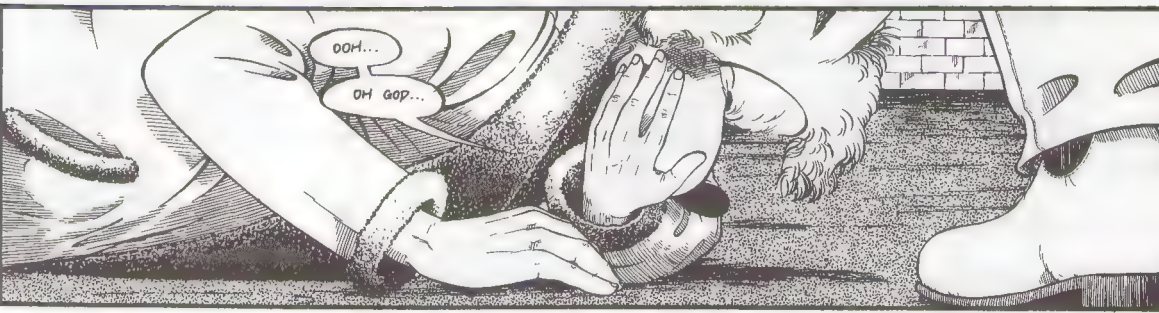
MMF... STILL FEELS LIKE IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN SPRAINED... TRY AND PUT SOME PRESSURE ON IT...

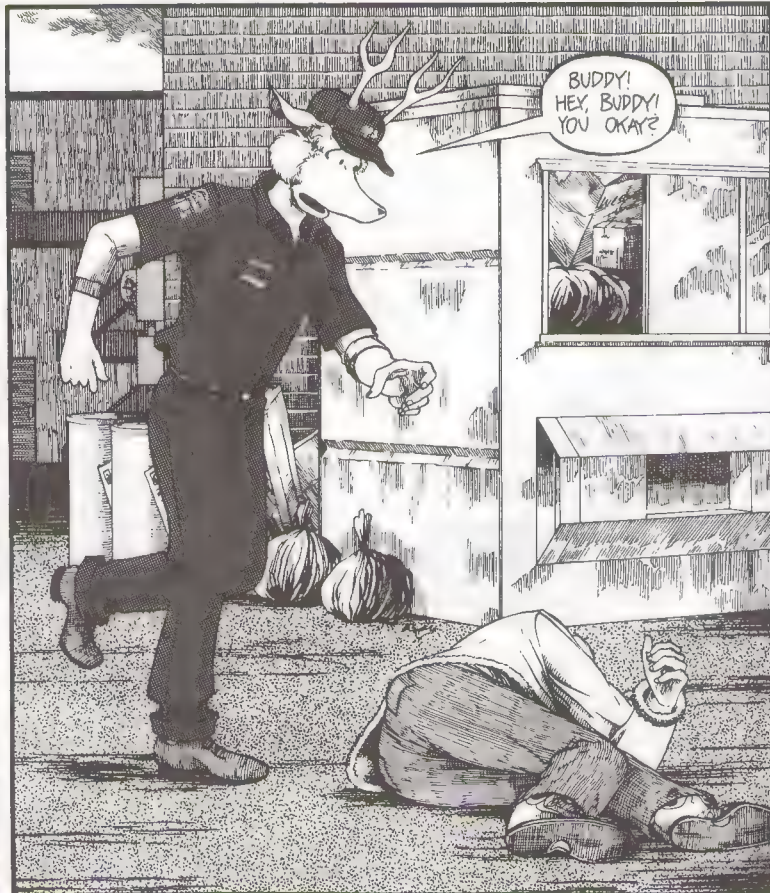
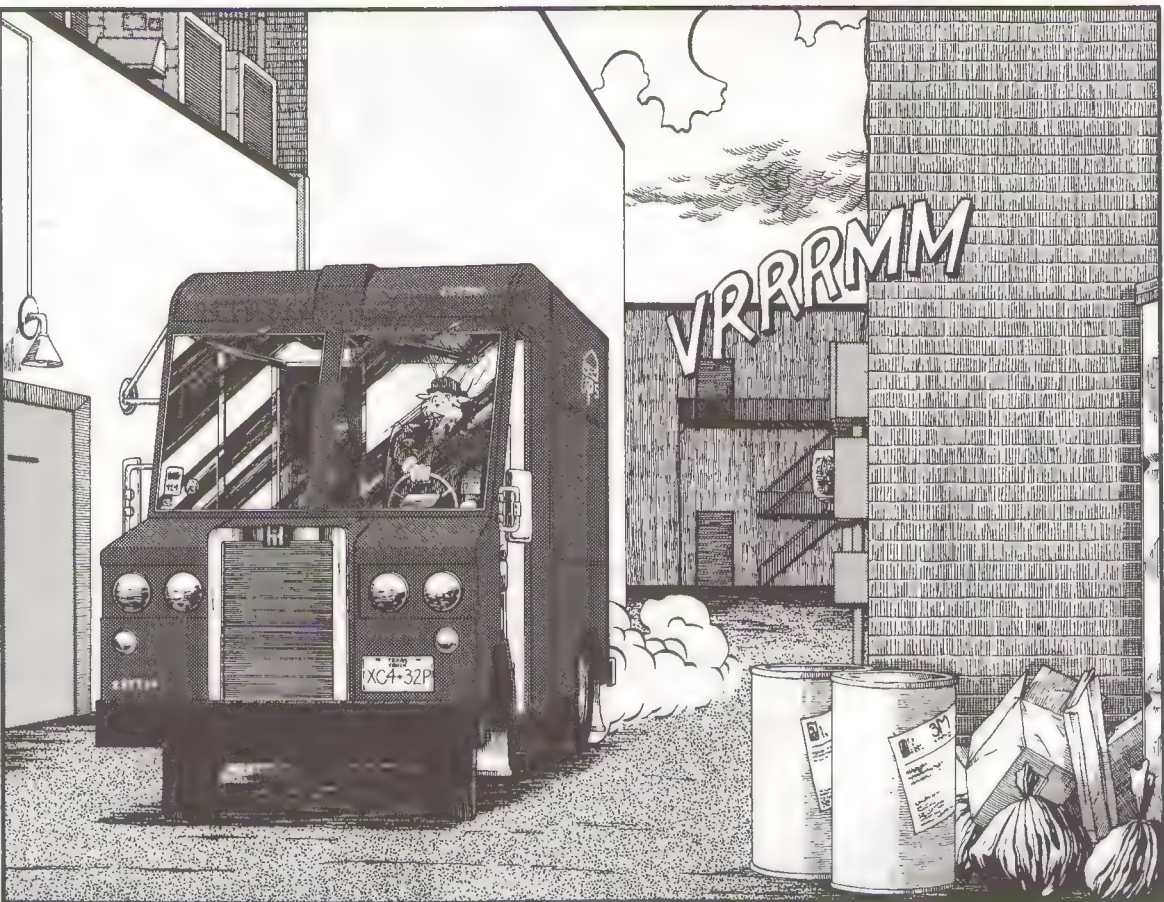


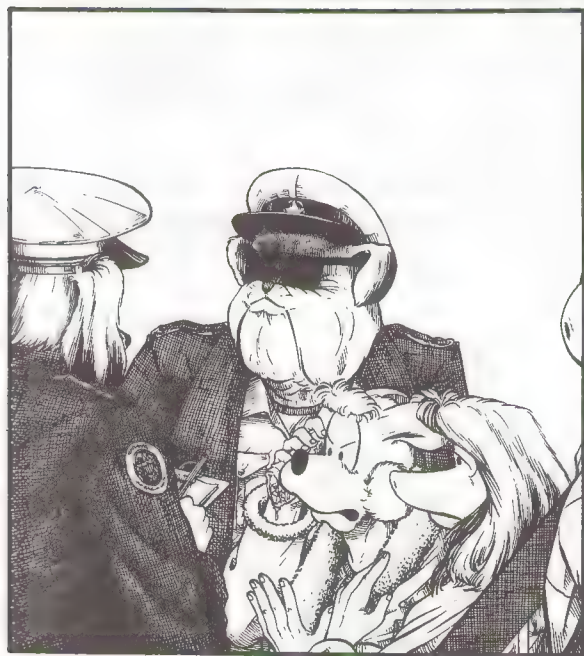
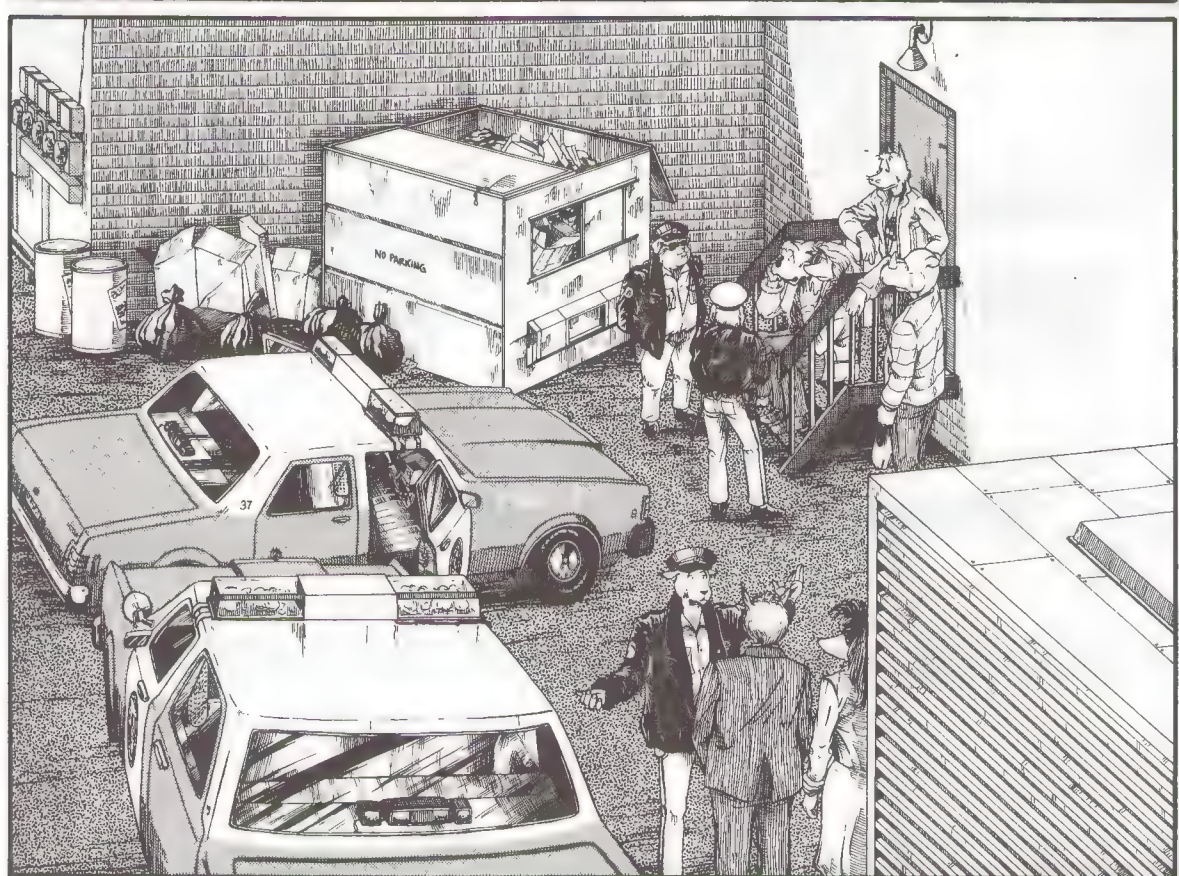
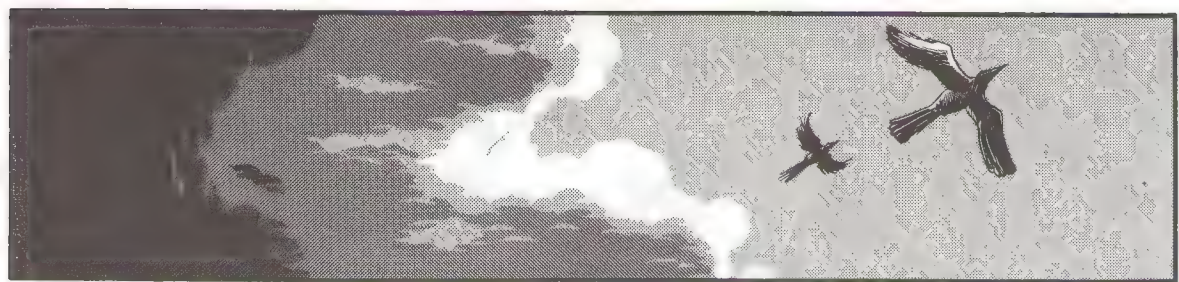
POW

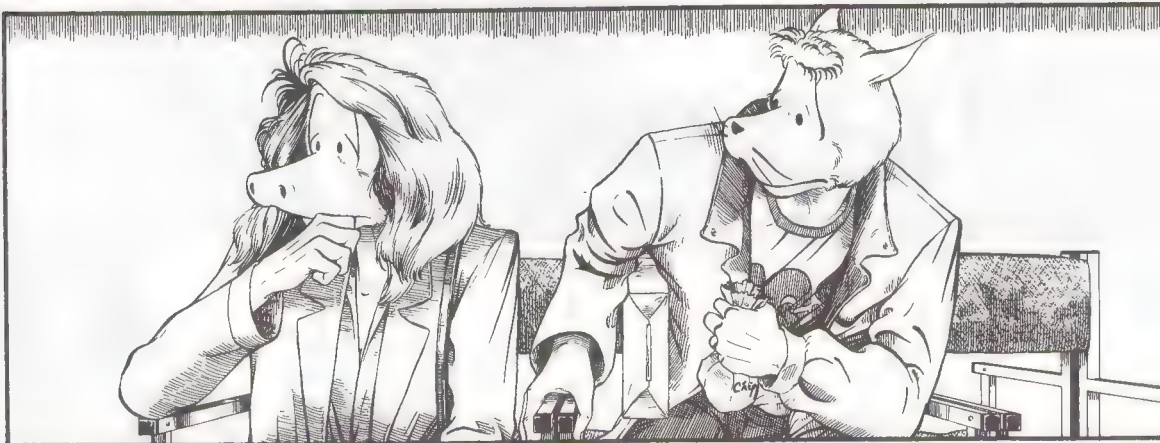
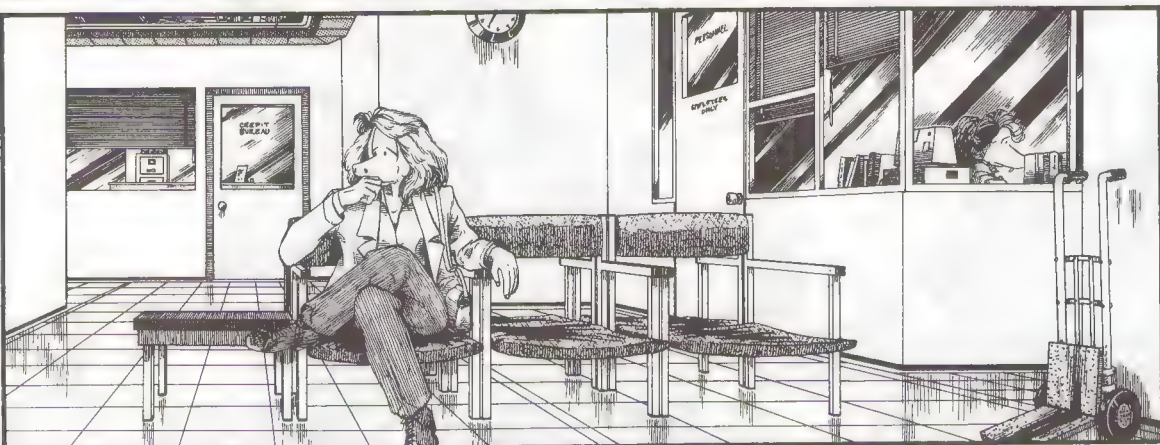


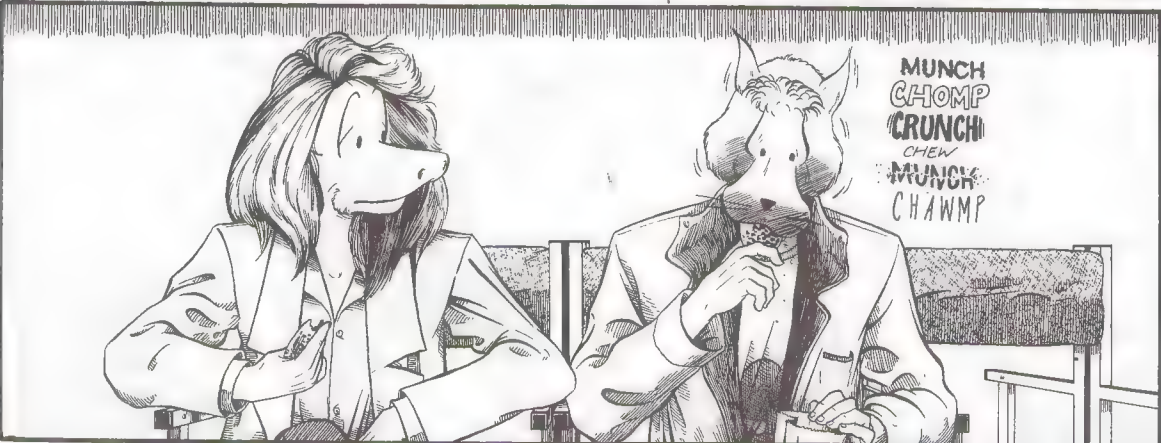
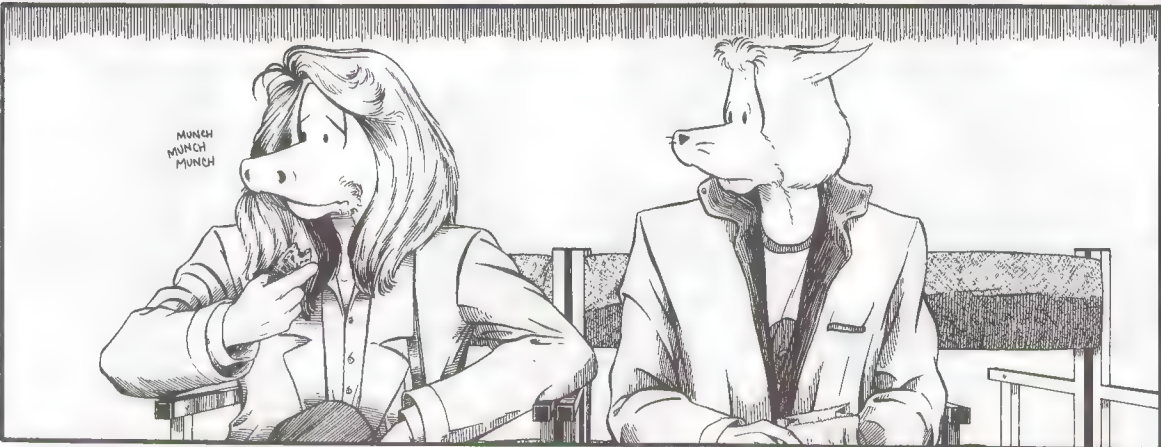
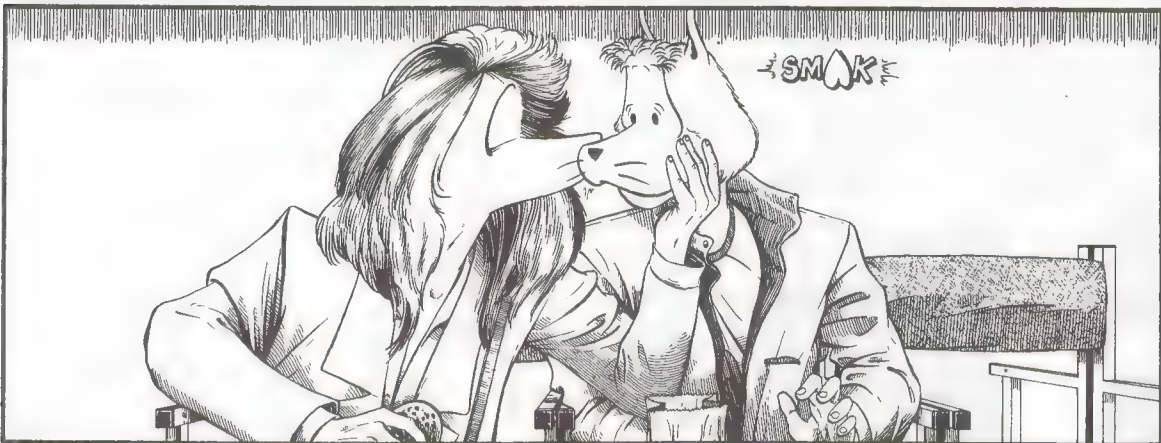
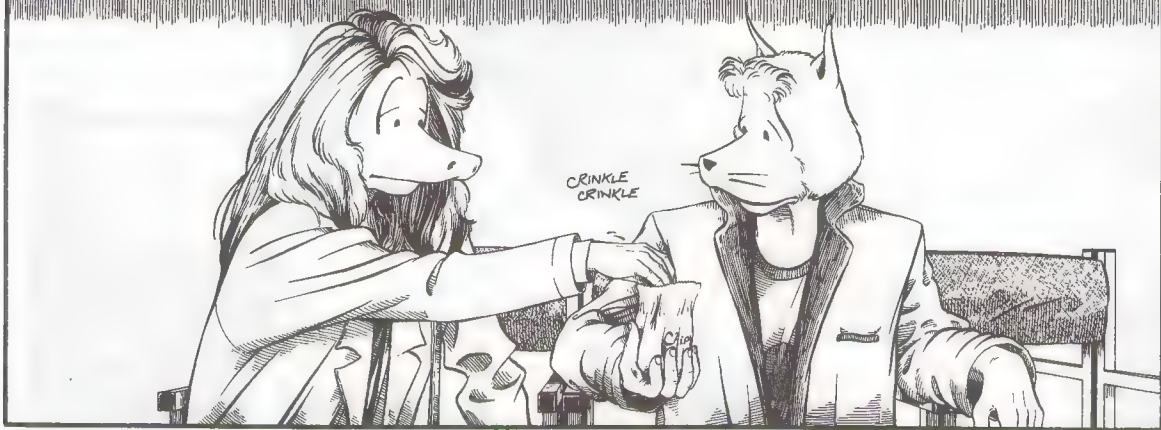


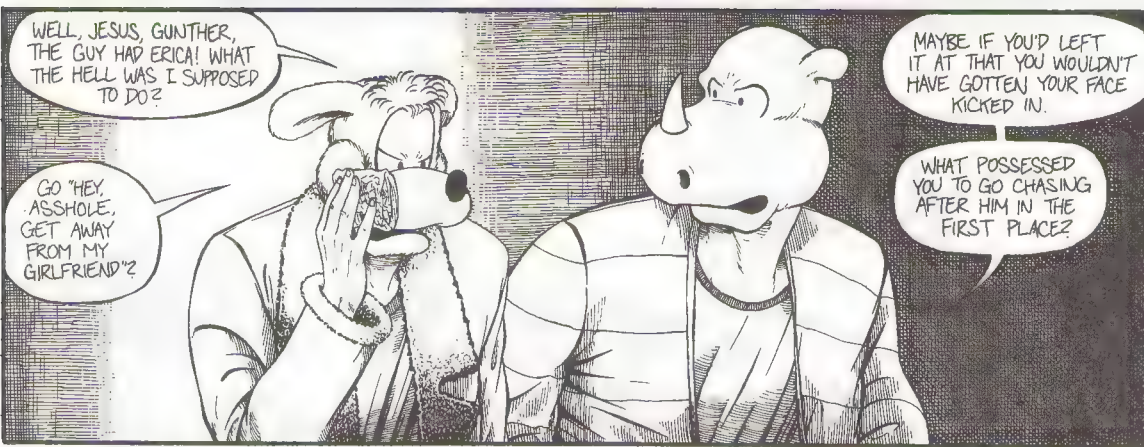












WELL, JESUS, GUNTHER,
THE GUY HAD ERICA! WHAT
THE HELL WAS I SUPPOSED
TO DO?

GO "HEY,
ASSHOLE,
GET AWAY
FROM MY
GIRLFRIEND"?

MAYBE IF YOU'D LEFT
IT AT THAT YOU WOULDN'T
HAVE GOTTEN YOUR FACE
KICKED IN.

WHAT POSSESSED
YOU TO GO CHASING
AFTER HIM IN THE
FIRST PLACE?



WELL, YOU KNOW
THEY'LL DO WHAT THEY
CAN. I GAVE 'EM THE
GUY'S DESCRIPTION
ABOUT 7 MILLION
TIMES.

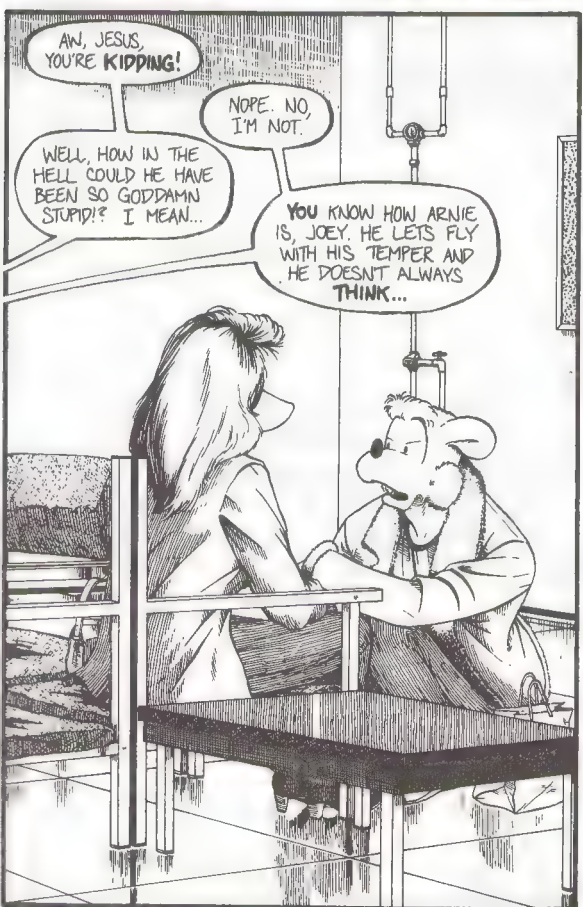
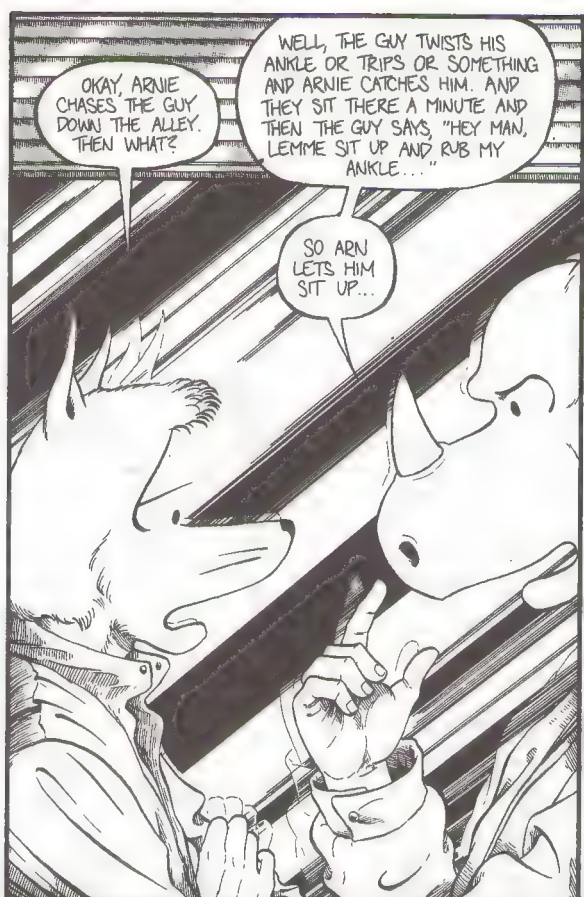
YOU'RE LUCKY TO
BE ALL RIGHT, BUD.

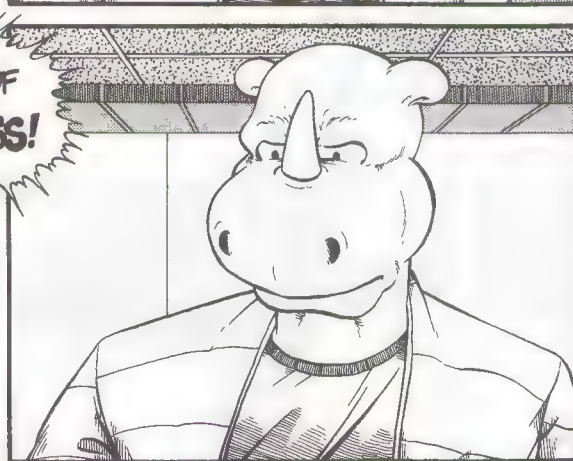
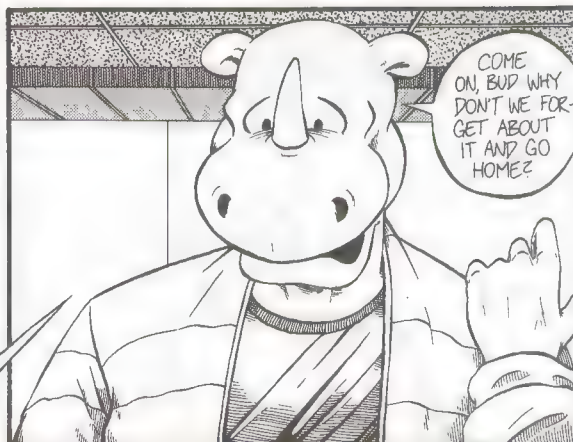
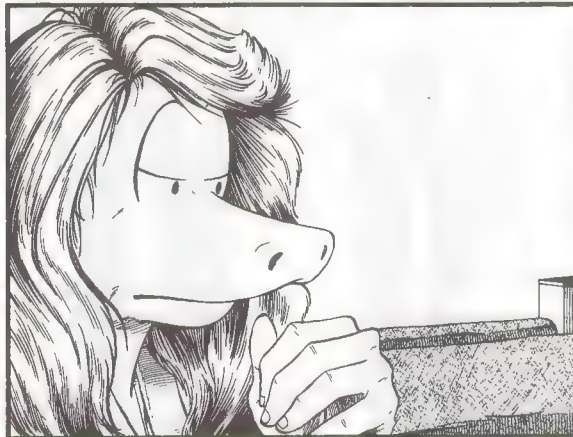
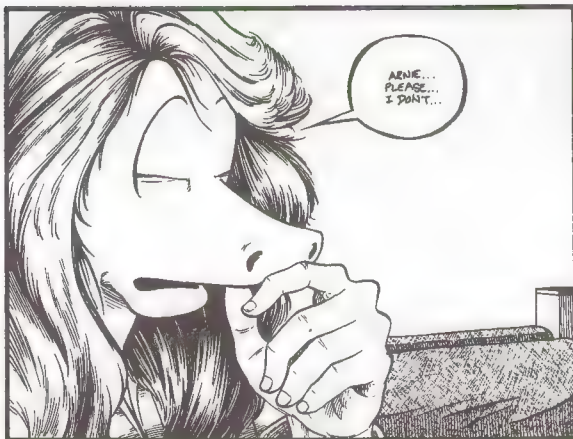
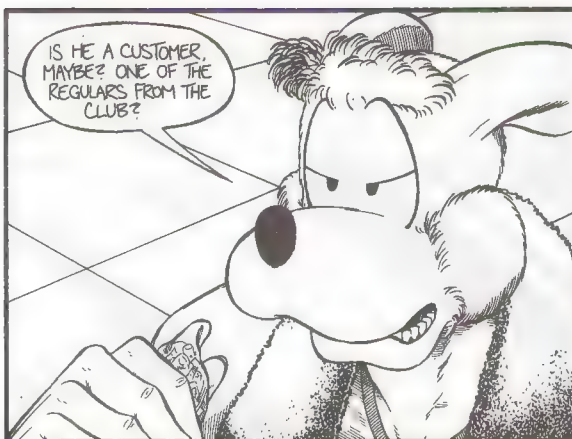
WHAT DID
THEY SAY,
BABY?

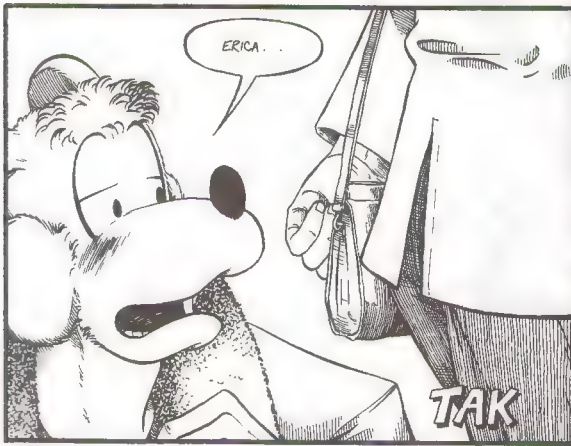
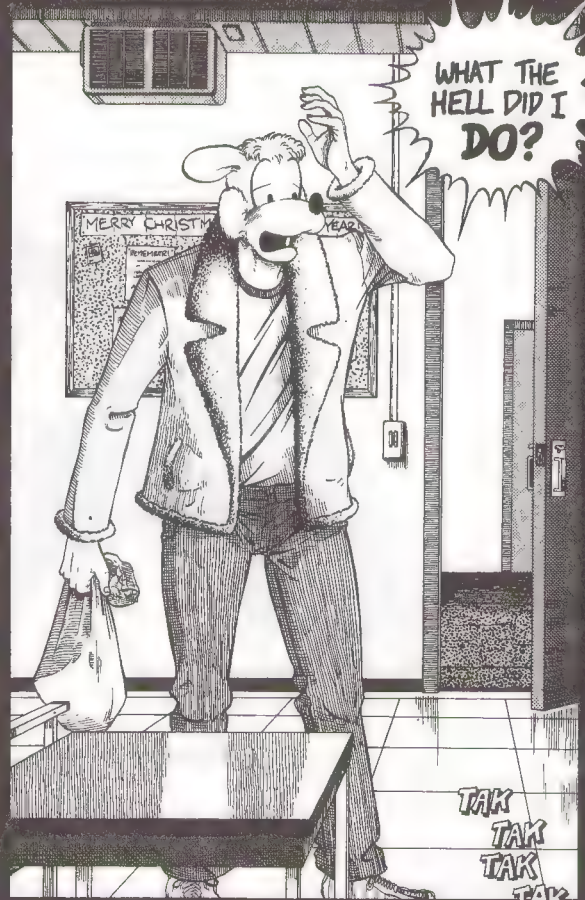
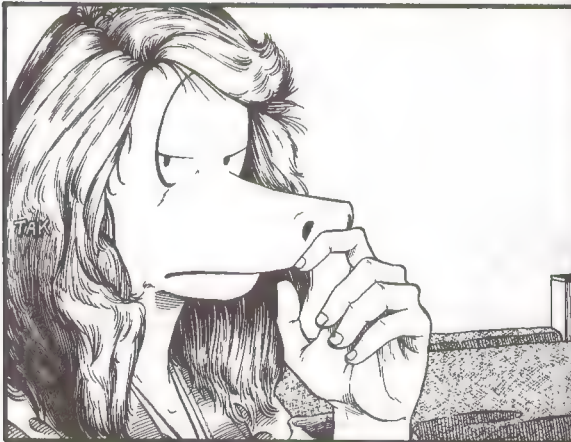
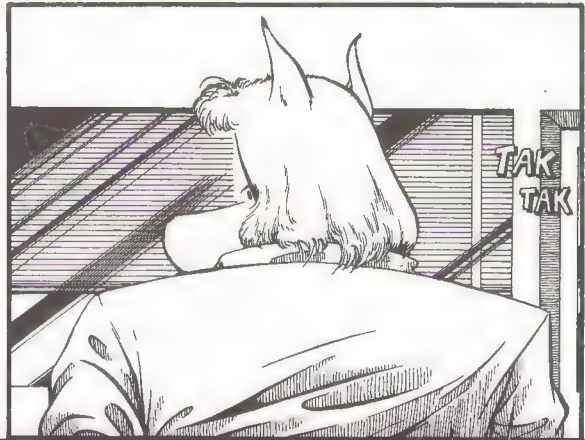
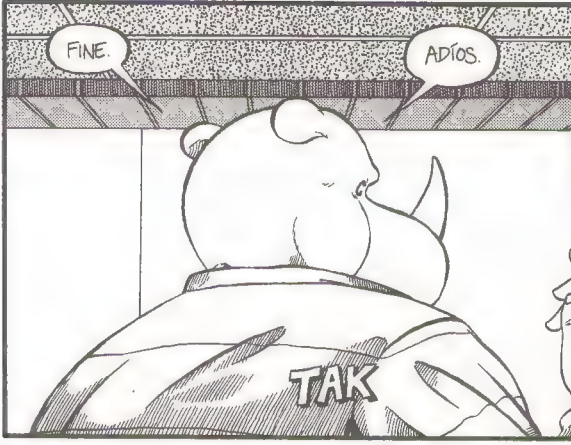
THEY THINK HE WON'T BE
COMING BACK. HOW ARE YOU,
SWEETHEART? YOU ALL RIGHT?



...UH, COULD YOU GUYS
LEAVE US ALONE
FOR A SECOND?

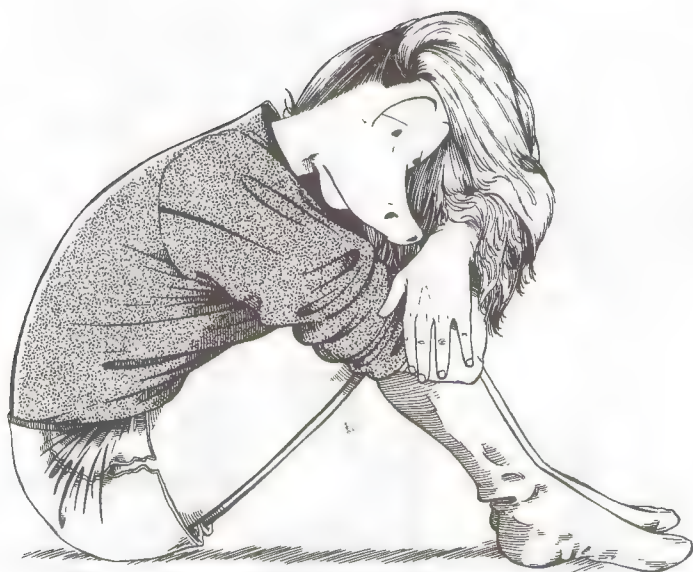






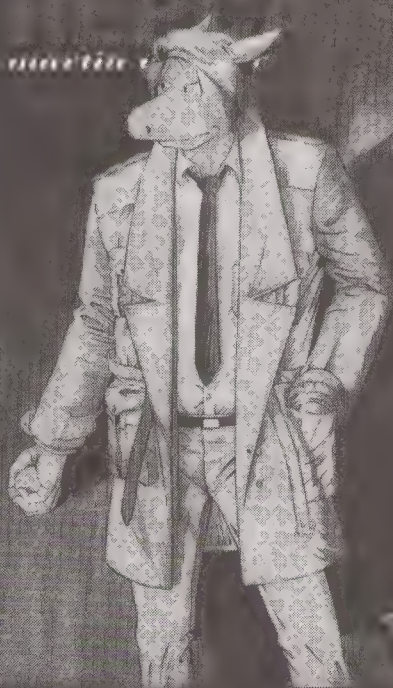
NOTHING, ARNIE.

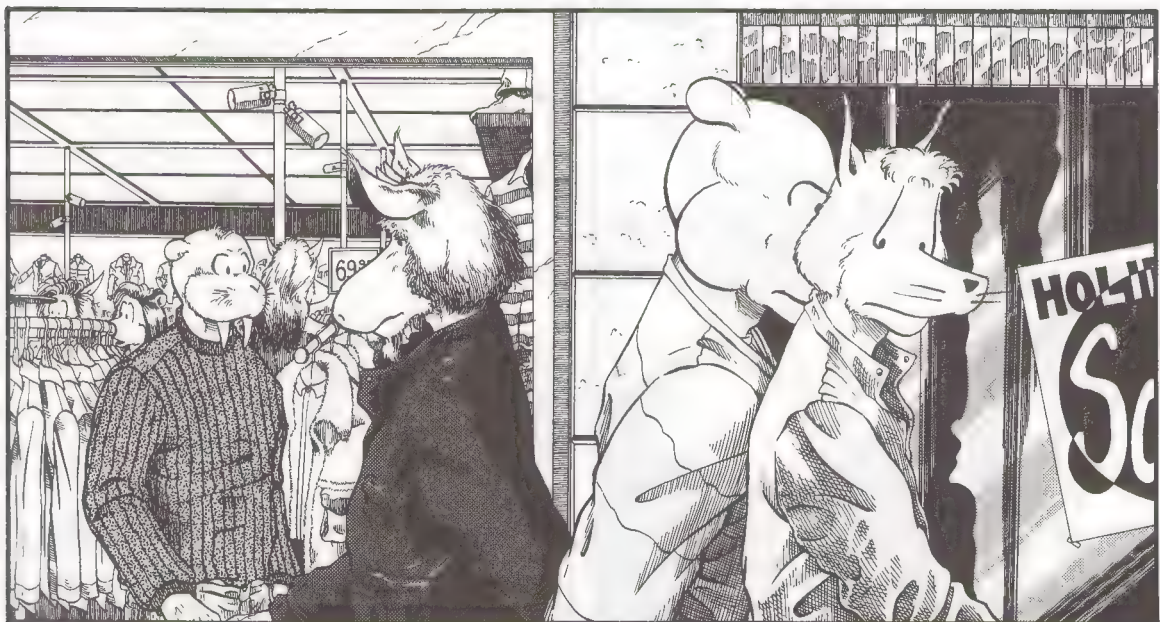
IT DOESN'T MATTER.



CHAPTER V

Intrusion







GUNTHER, LISTEN,
I'M SORRY IF I PISSED
YOU GUYS OFF, BUT...

WHOA, ARN!
ARNIE, DON'T APOLO-
GIZE TO US, MAN.

I KNOW YOU'RE
UPSET ABOUT WHAT
HAPPENED TODAY.
I WOULD BE, TOO!
YOU DON'T HAVE
TO BE SORRY ABOUT
THAT.



LOOK, MAYBE I BUTTED IN
WHEN I SHOULDN'T HAVE, BUT
I JUST THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE,
YOU KNOW, GETTING ON ERICA'S
CASE A LITTLE BIT, THAT'S ALL.

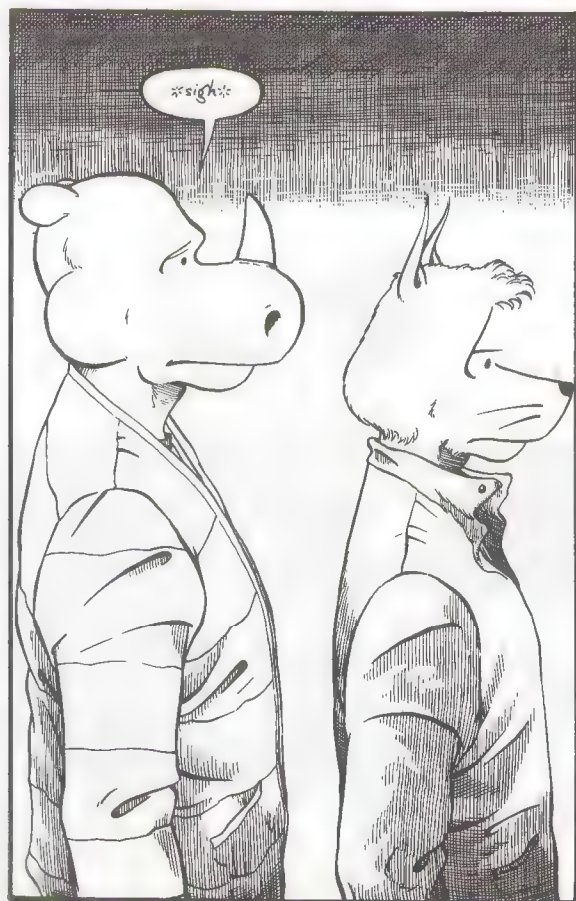
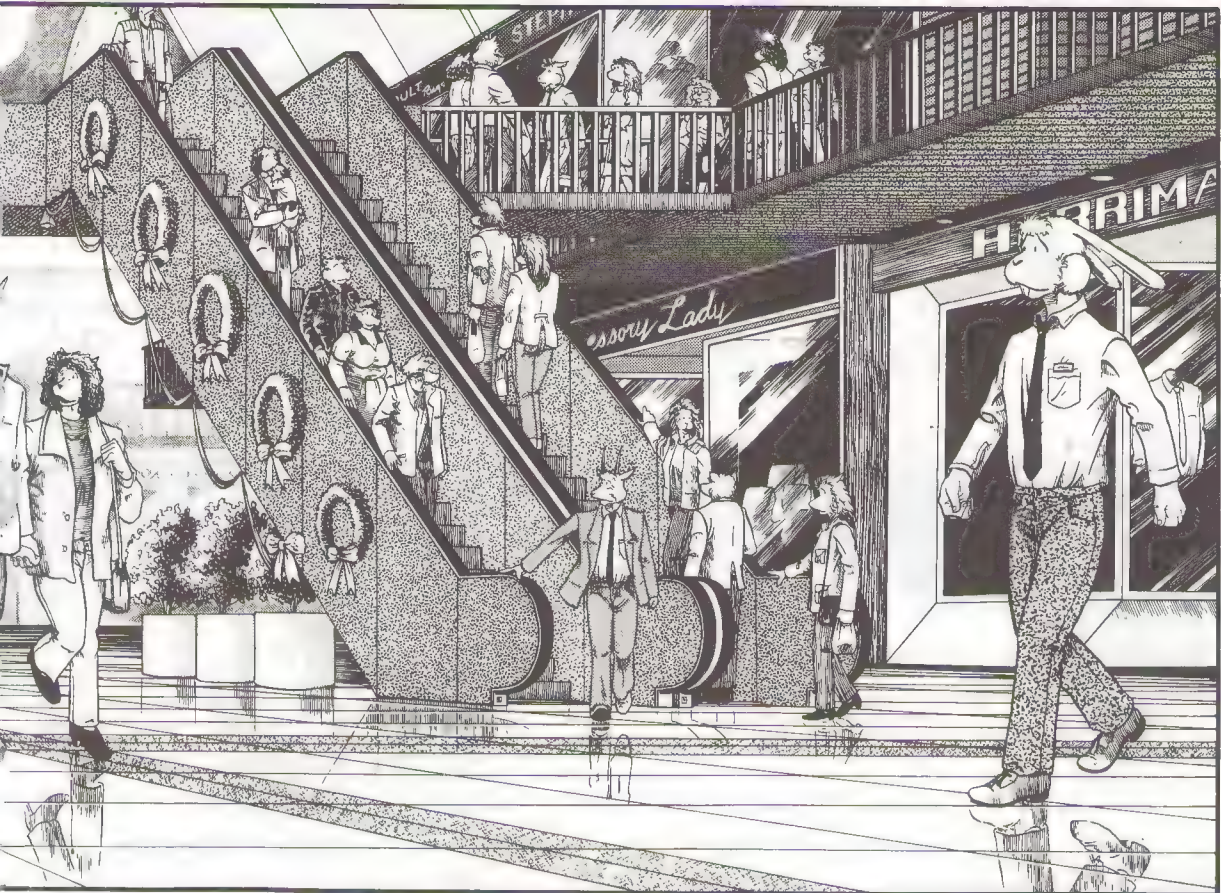
ERICA'S OUR
FRIEND, TOO, YOU
KNOW. WE DON'T
WANT ANY WEIRDOS
GETTIN' THEIR
HANDS ON HER,
EITHER, OKAY?

I UNDER-
STAND, YOU
DIDN'T...



RIGHT.... LISTEN, I'D BETTER CATCH UP TO
HER. I'VE GOT A FEELING I'VE GOT A LIT-
TLE EXPLAINING TO DO. I'LL CALL YOU
GUYS, OKAY?

SOUNDS GREAT,
ARN. TAKE IT EASY!



ERICA!

CLOP

ERICA!
WAIT!

CLOP

WILL YOU WAIT?
SLOW DOWN!

CLOP

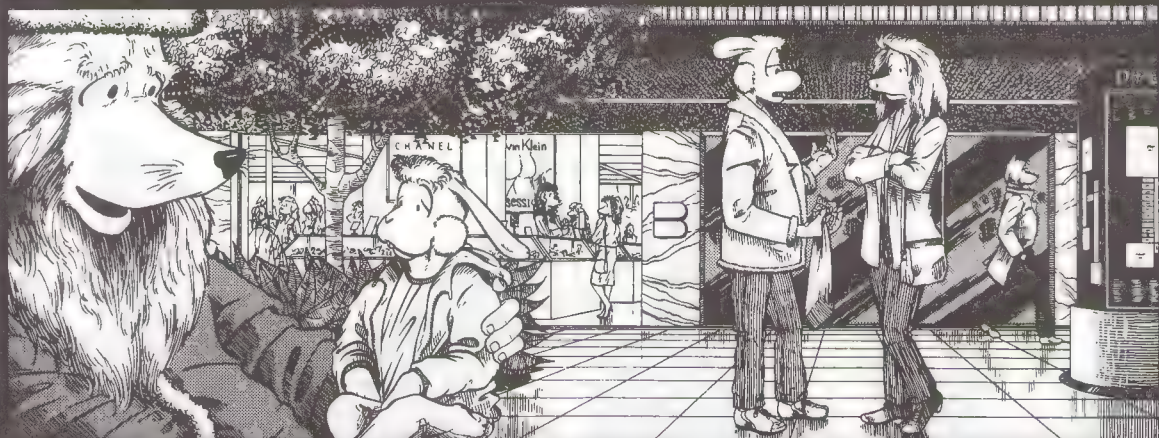
CLOP

CLOP

CLOP

CLOP

huff *puff*
huff *puff*
THANK YOU.



SEE, THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED.

FIRST, YOU REALLY SHOULDN'T HOLD ARNIE'S LITTLE ANGRY OUTBURSTS AGAINST HIM, YOU KNOW, LIKE THE WAY HE CUSSSED ME OUT AFTER MY FIRST FAINTING SPELL BY THE BOOKSTORE, AND THE WAY HE GOT ON MY CASE AFTER THE POLICE LEFT. SEE, ARNIE HAS A LOT OF HIS OWN INSECURITIES TO WORK OUT... AND, WELL, THE WAY I SCREAMED, HE DIDN'T KNOW...

❖ sigh ❖

SORRY, GIVE ME A SECOND.

WHAT I SUPPOSE I'M TRYING TO SAY IS THAT LOVE MAKES YOU BEHAVE FUNNY.

YOU KNOW, NOT ALWAYS SENSIBLE. I KNOW, I KNOW, "GEE, THAT'S KINDA OBVIOUS." BUT YOU KNOW HOW THEY SAY THAT THE BEST WAY TO BE IN LOVE IS TO LOVE YOURSELF? THAT YOU REALLY CAN'T LOVE ANOTHER PERSON UNLESS YOU LOVE YOURSELF FIRST? WELL, I'M SURE THAT'S TRUE IN PRINCIPLE, AND I GUESS YOU COULD ALSO SAY THAT ANYBODY OUT THERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE THAT WELL-ADJUSTED PROBABLY MAKES A HELL OF A PARTNER.

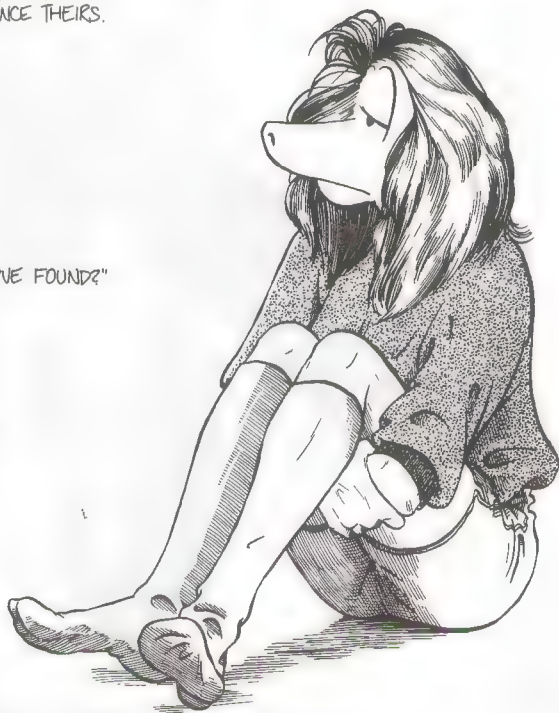
BUT I ALSO THINK IT'S NAÏVE TO BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE VERY MANY PEOPLE OUT THERE LIKE THAT. I THINK THAT MOST PEOPLE OUT THERE FALLING IN LOVE ARE VERY INSECURE, AND THEY LOOK FOR LOVE PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE ANY TO GIVE THEMSELVES.

I'M NOT SAYING THE WHOLE WORLD IS MADE UP OF LONELYHEART DEPRESSO CASES. MOST PEOPLE MANAGE TO KEEP THEIR INSECURITIES IN CHECK, BUT I THINK MANY PEOPLE STILL HAVE THEM. AND WHEN THEY LOOK FOR A RELATIONSHIP, THEY LOOK FOR SOMEONE WHOSE INSECURITIES SORT OF BALANCE THEIRS.

WHICH IS WHY WHEN YOU FALL IN LOVE IN A SITUATION LIKE THAT, YOU DO LOSE A LOT OF YOUR INSECURITIES, BUT YOU GAIN SOME NEW ONES.

LIKE "CAN I KEEP THIS WONDERFUL NEW THING I'VE FOUND?"

"WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I LOSE IT?"



OH, WELL, MAYBE I'M WRONG. MAYBE I'M
STICKING THE REST OF THE WORLD WITH MY
PROBLEMS SO I'LL FEEL BETTER.

STILL, IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN A RELATIONSHIP
OR YOU'RE IN ONE NOW, YOU'LL KNOW WHAT
I MEAN ABOUT HOW YOU SUDDENLY FIND
YOURSELF IN A FIGHT WITH YOUR
PARTNER...

...OVER STUPID
SHIT, RIGHT?

LITTLE THINGS BECOME SO PERSONAL!

ANYWAY, I'M GETTING SIDE-
TRACKED. THE REASON THE SITUATION
AT THE MALL GOT SO OUT OF HAND
WAS BECAUSE EVER SINCE I MOVED
TO NEW ORLEANS—1983—I HAD
CREATED A NEW LIFE FOR MYSELF,
AND I HAD SYSTEMATICALLY BEGUN
BLOCKING OUT THE OLD ONE.

TELLING MYSELF IT WAS ALL A NASTY
HORRIBLE DREAM THAT WASN'T GOING TO
BOTHER ME ANY MORE, EVEN THOUGH
MEMORIES AND NIGHTMARES STAYED
WITH ME FOR A WHILE. BUT EVEN
THEY FADED...BEFORE LONG.

SO WHEN I SAW KEVIN (THAT'S HIS
NAME, KEVIN), I FREAKED BECAUSE PART
OF MY OLD LIFE HAD CAUGHT UP TO ME.
AND I SUPPOSE THE REASON I DIDN'T
GO RIGHT OVER THE EDGE IS BECAUSE OF
THIS LITTLE REALISTIC SECTION OF MY
BRAIN THAT TOLD ME IT MIGHT HAPPEN
SOMEDAY.

WHICH WAS WHY I DIDN'T TELL ARNIE WHO
KEVIN WAS...EVEN THERE IN THE ALLEY.
I WANTED TO DEAL WITH IT. SO IT'S MY
FAULT ARNIE WAS HURT.

IF I'D SAID SOMETHING, ARNIE
WOULDN'T HAVE FELT HE HAD TO
PROTECT ME.

BUT AFTER THE MALL, I WAS OKAY.
KEVIN HAD COME AND KEVIN HAD GONE.
MY PAST HAD CAUGHT UP TO ME AND
I HAD **DEALT WITH IT!**

I WAS STILL ME!

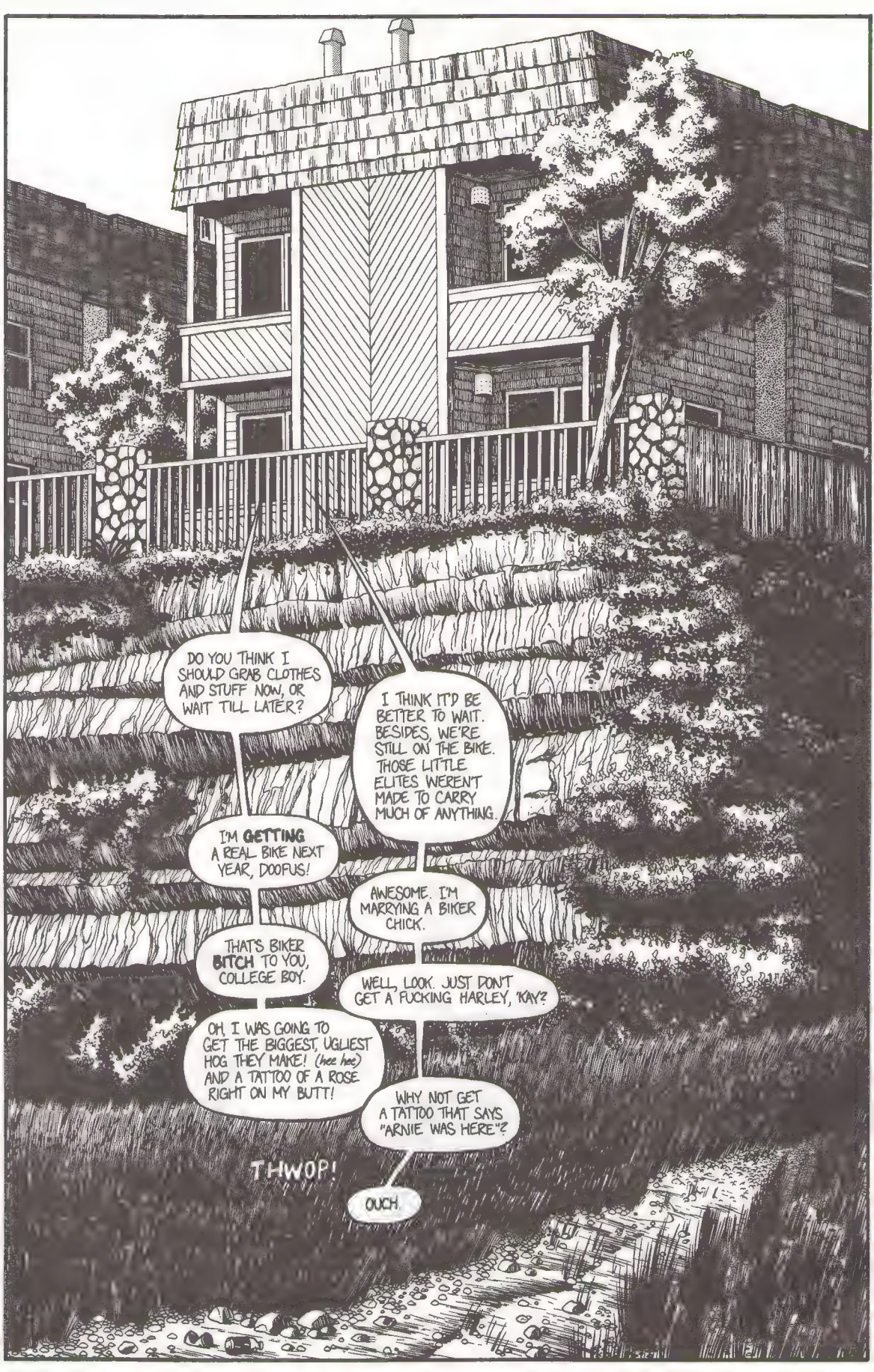
WELL, I GUESS YOU CAN FIGURE OUT
THE NEXT LINE. "ALAS, THINGS DID
NOT STAY HUNKY-DORY FOREVER!"

SOMETHING LIKE THAT, YEAH.
BUT I GUESS IT'S TIME TO SHUT
UP AND LET YOU READ ALL
ABOUT IT YOURSELF.



YOU KNOW, I'VE JUST ABOUT HAD IT WITH THIS DAMN FOOT.





DO YOU THINK I SHOULD GRAB CLOTHES AND STUFF NOW, OR WAIT TILL LATER?

I THINK IT'D BE BETTER TO WAIT. BESIDES, WE'RE STILL ON THE BIKE. THOSE LITTLE ELITES WERENT MADE TO CARRY MUCH OF ANYTHING.

I'M **GETTING** A REAL BIKE NEXT YEAR, DOOFUS!

AWESOME. I'M MARRYING A BIKER CHICK.

THAT'S BIKER BITCH TO YOU, COLLEGE BOY.

WELL, LOOK. JUST DONT GET A FUCKING HARLEY, 'KAY?

OH I WAS GOING TO GET THE BIGGEST, UGLIEST HOG THEY MAKE! (hee hee) AND A TATTOO OF A ROSE RIGHT ON MY BUTT!

WHY NOT GET A TATTOO THAT SAYS "ARNIE WAS HERE"?

THWOP!

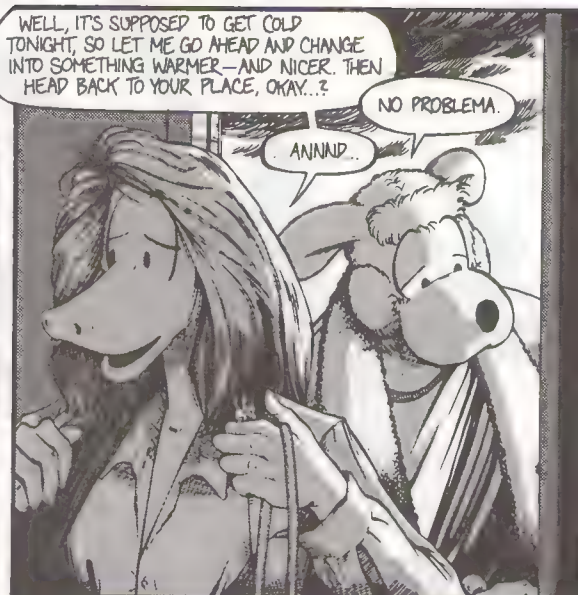
OUCH.



IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU LEARNED WHO WEARS THE LEATHER PANTS IN THIS FAMILY...

SWEET-HEART

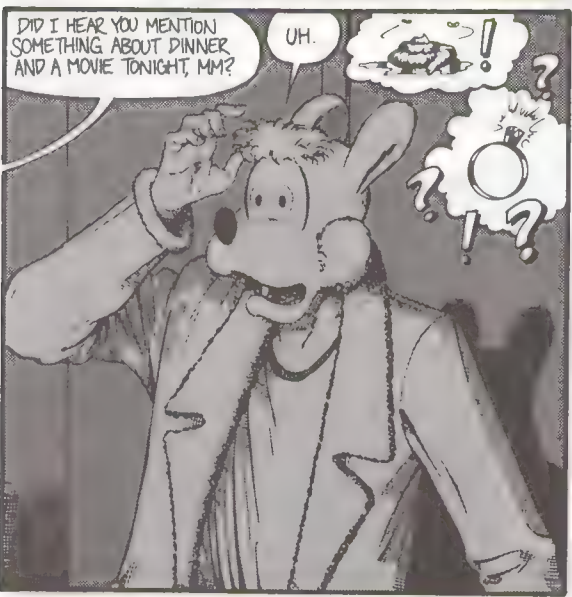
~smak~
~smak~



WELL, IT'S SUPPOSED TO GET COLD TONIGHT, SO LET ME GO AHEAD AND CHANGE INTO SOMETHING WARMER--AND NICER. THEN HEAD BACK TO YOUR PLACE, OKAY...?

NO PROBLEM.

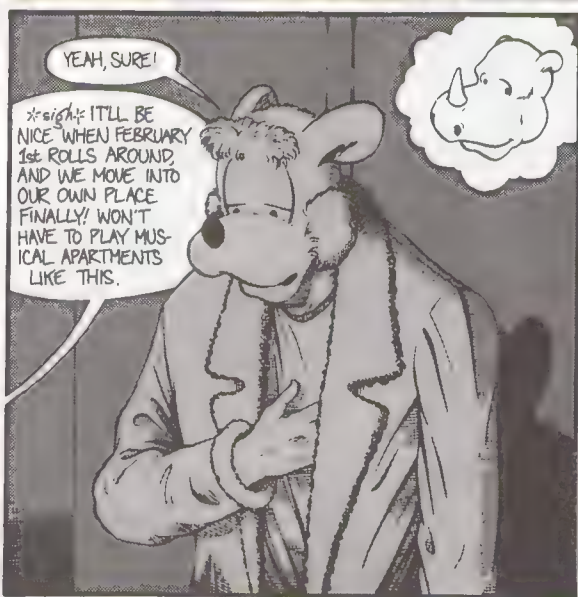
ANNND...



DID I HEAR YOU MENTION SOMETHING ABOUT DINNER AND A MOVIE TONIGHT, MM?

UH.

! ?
! ?
! ?



YEAH, SURE!

sigh IT'LL BE NICE WHEN FEBRUARY 1st ROLLS AROUND, AND WE MOVE INTO OUR OWN PLACE FINALLY! WON'T HAVE TO PLAY MUSICAL APARTMENTS LIKE THIS.

~thought bubble~



ARNIE! ahem. I BEG YOUR PARDON....!

I JUST THOUGHT YOU COULD USE A LITTLE HELP WITH YOUR...

ZZZZZZ

PLOP

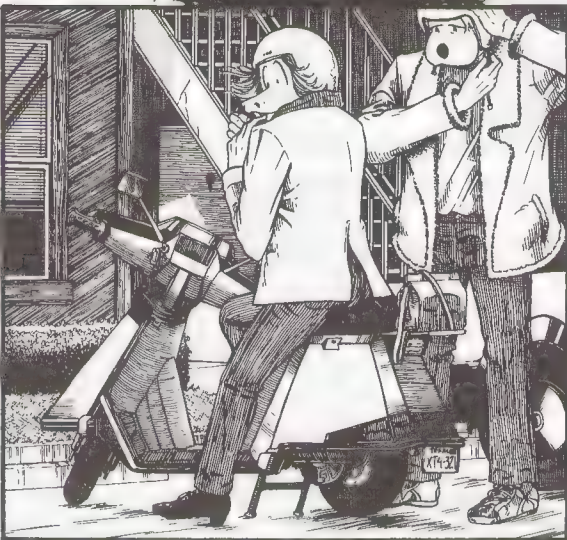


THAT'S BETTER!

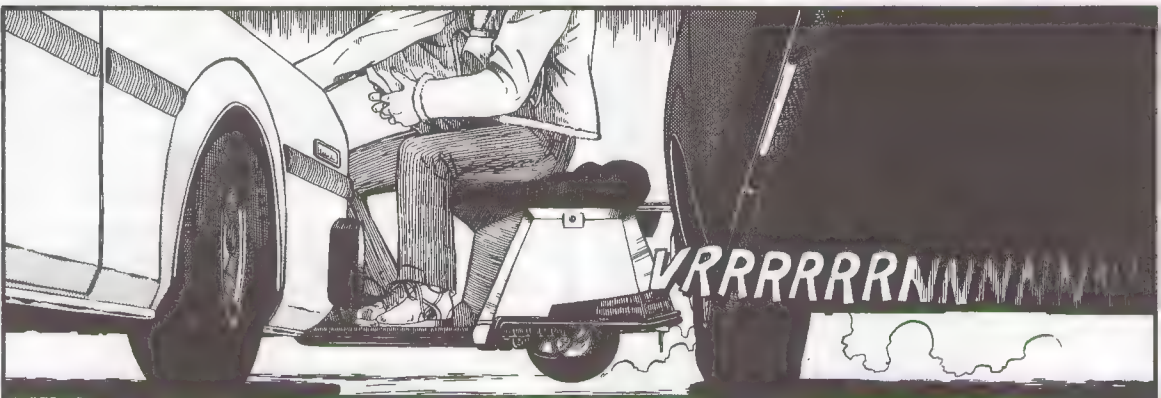
♪ KEEP GO-ING! ♪



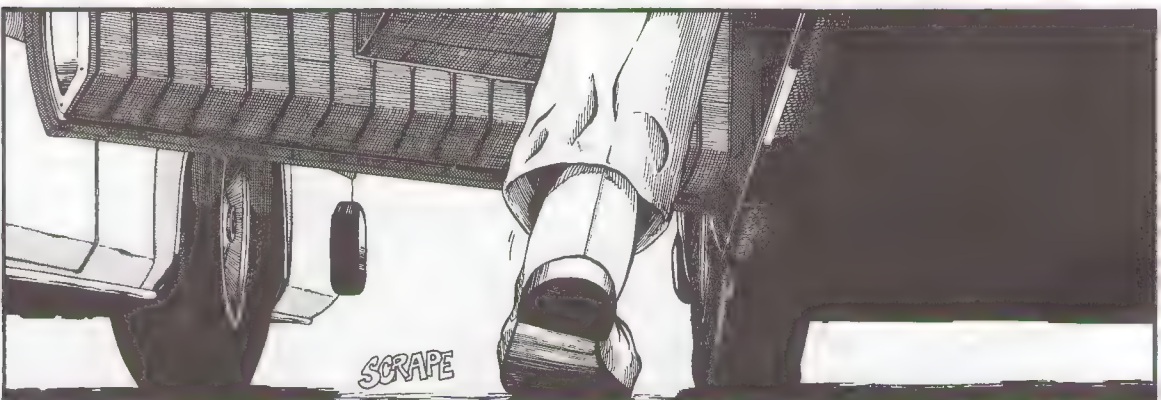
SSSSSSHHHHHH



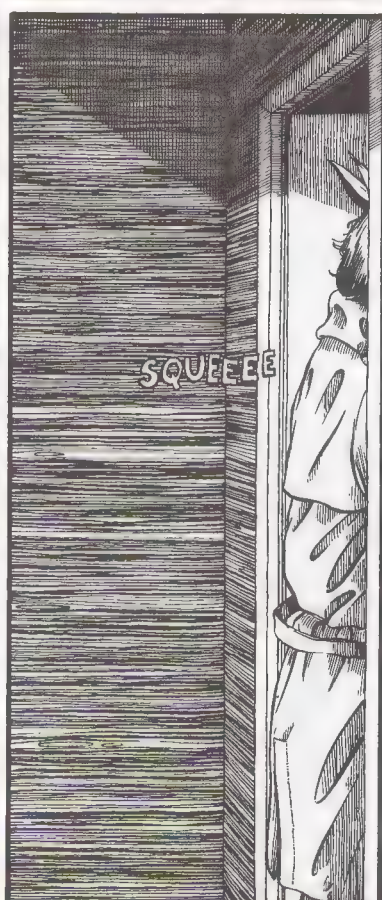
VRN VRRRRNNNNNN

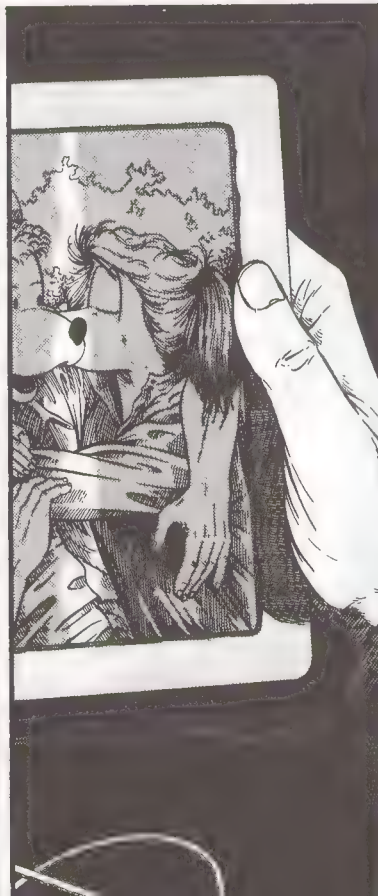
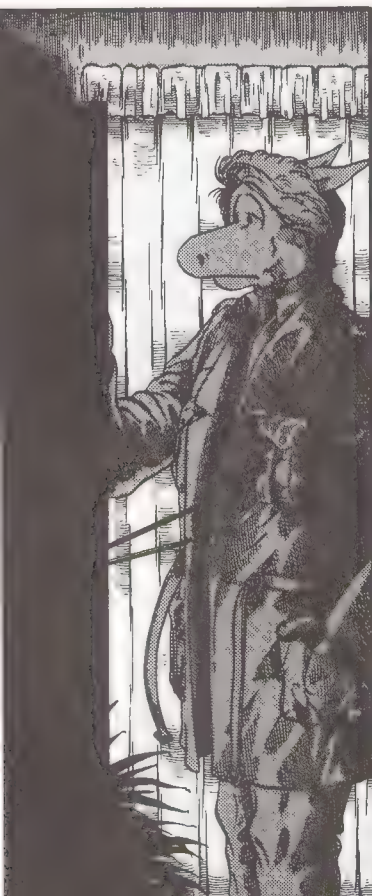
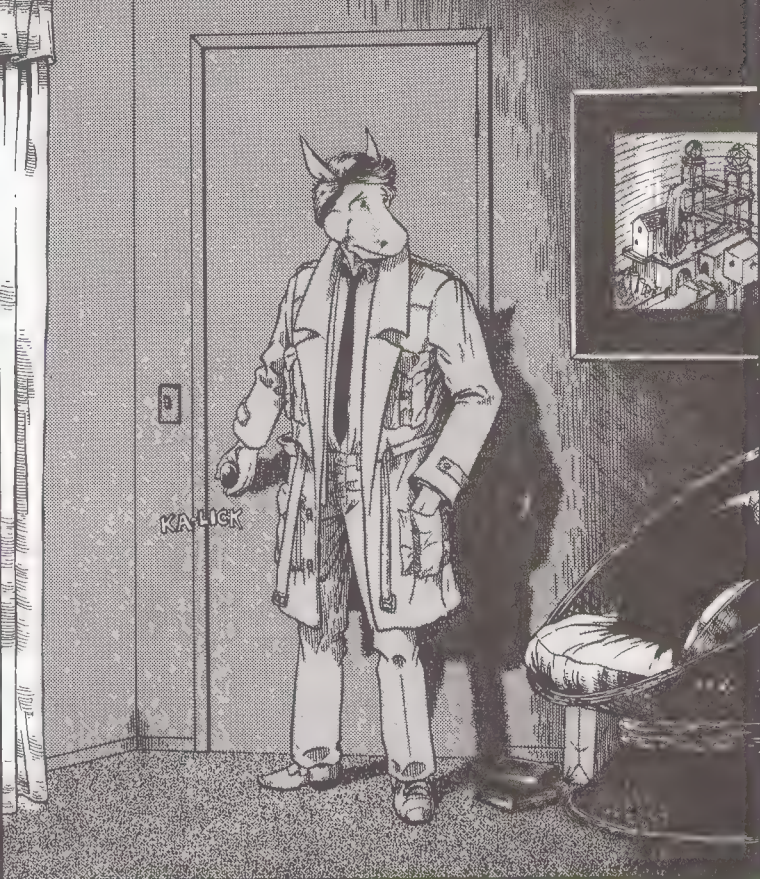


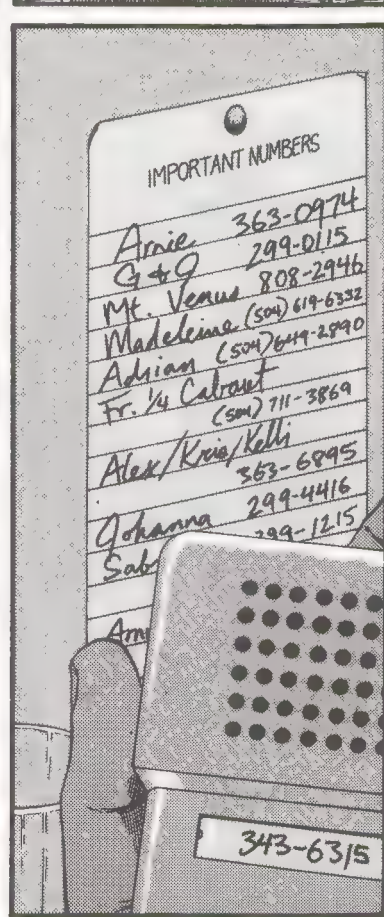
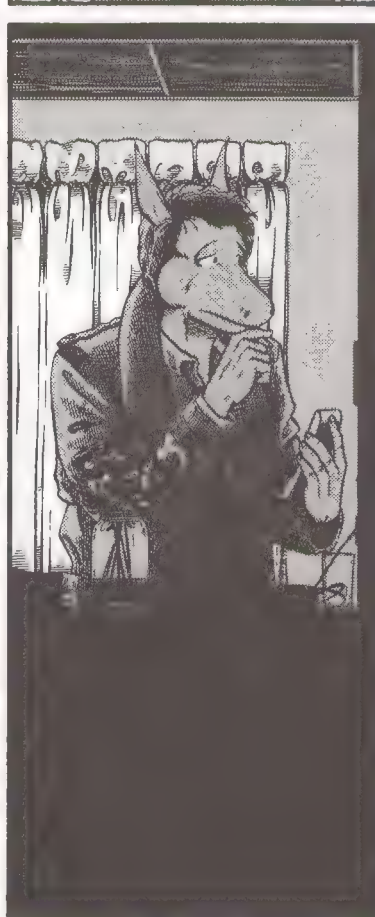
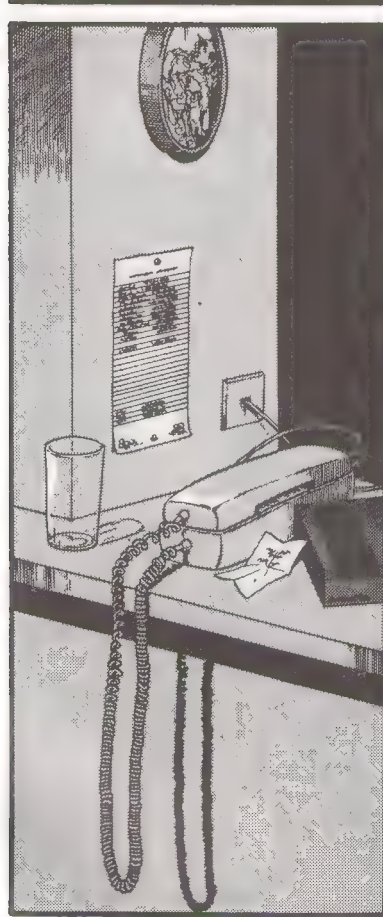
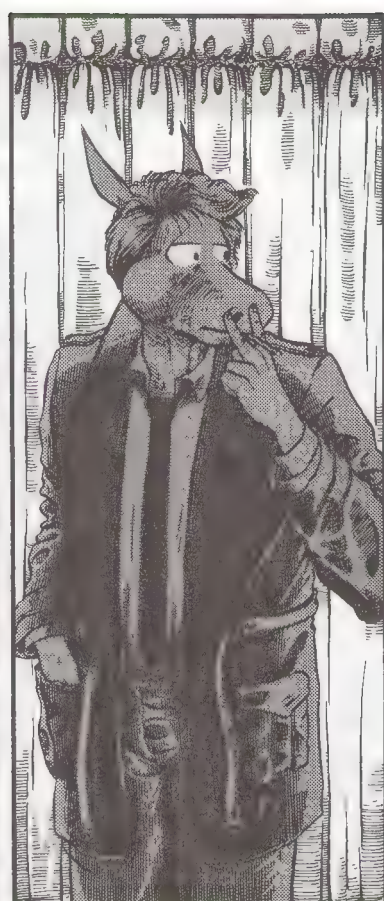
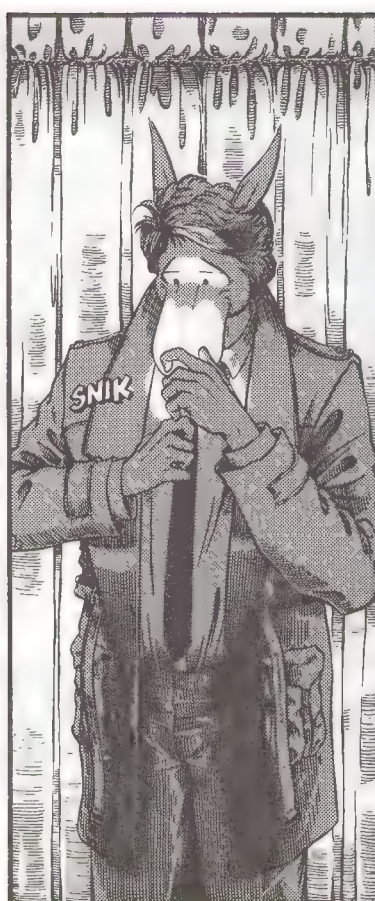
VRRRRRRR

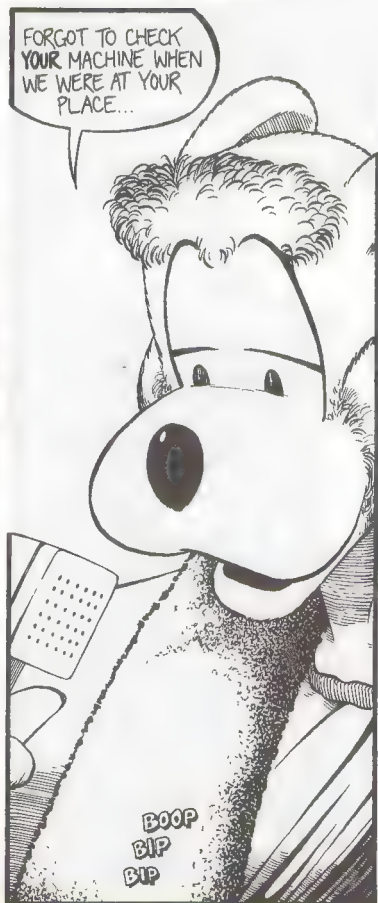
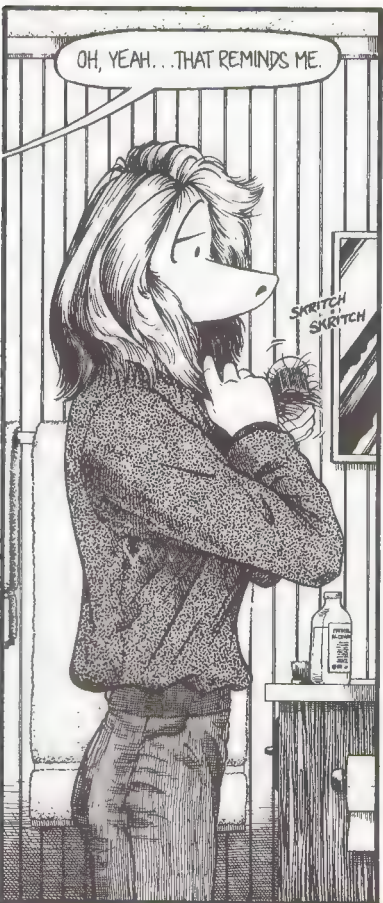
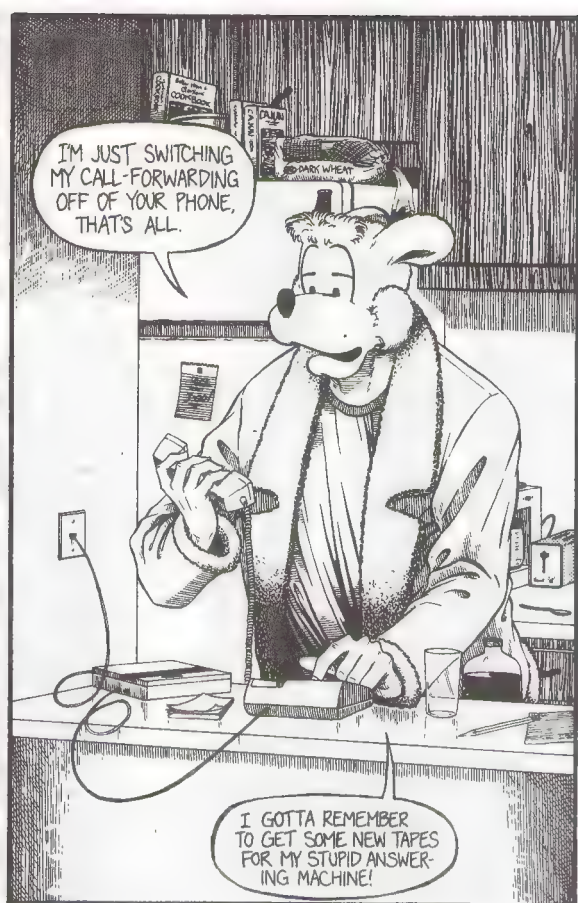


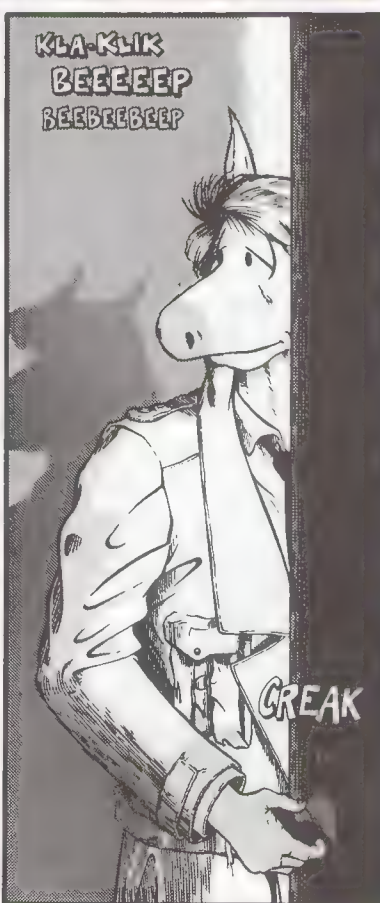
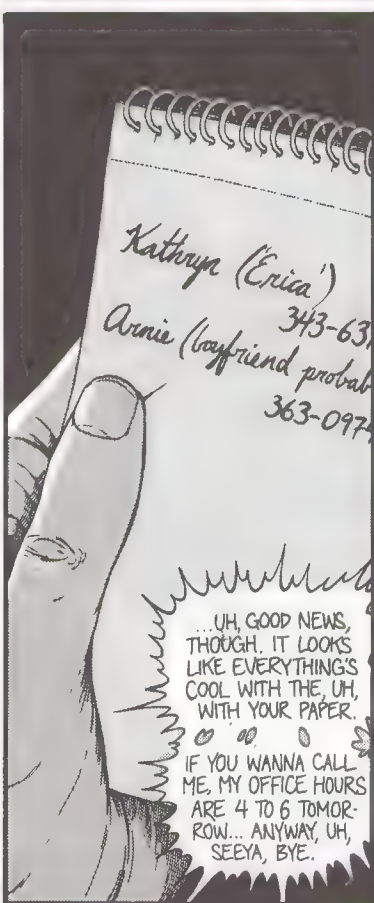
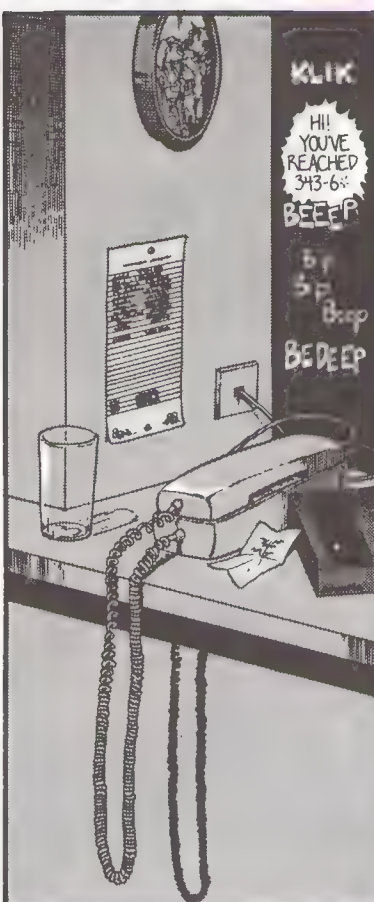
SCRAPE













WELL, YOU SURE DID GET OUT OF ALL THOSE NICE THINGS YOU CHANGED INTO PRETTY FAST. DIDN'T YOU, BABY?

MIND YOU, I'M NOT COMPLAINING.

heh heh

ARNIE?

YEAH, HON.

NOTHING'S GONNA CHANGE WITH US, IS IT?

W...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "NOTHING'S GONNA CHANGE WITH US?"

WELL... YOU KNOW. ALL THE THINGS WE'VE PLANNED TOGETHER. YOU GRADUATE, WE GET MARRIED...

MOVE INTO A MILLION DOLLAR MANSION IN WEST LAKE HILLS!

hee hee -- YEAH!

MATCHING PORSCHE'S, FLY TO CANCON EVERY WEEKEND IN OUR LEAR JET.

RIGHT. OH, YEAH

EXACTLY! hee hee -- **AND THE CAYMANS!**

hee hee hee hee

sigh

NO, HONEY. NOTHING'S GONNA CHANGE. WHY SHOULD IT?

GOOD. 'COS I DON'T WANT IT TO.

THEN IT WON'T SEE? THAT WAS EASY.

MM-HMM

...ARE YOU STILL A LITTLE FREAKED OUT FROM TODAY?

MM. NO. NOT REALLY

LOVE YOU.

I LOVE YOU.

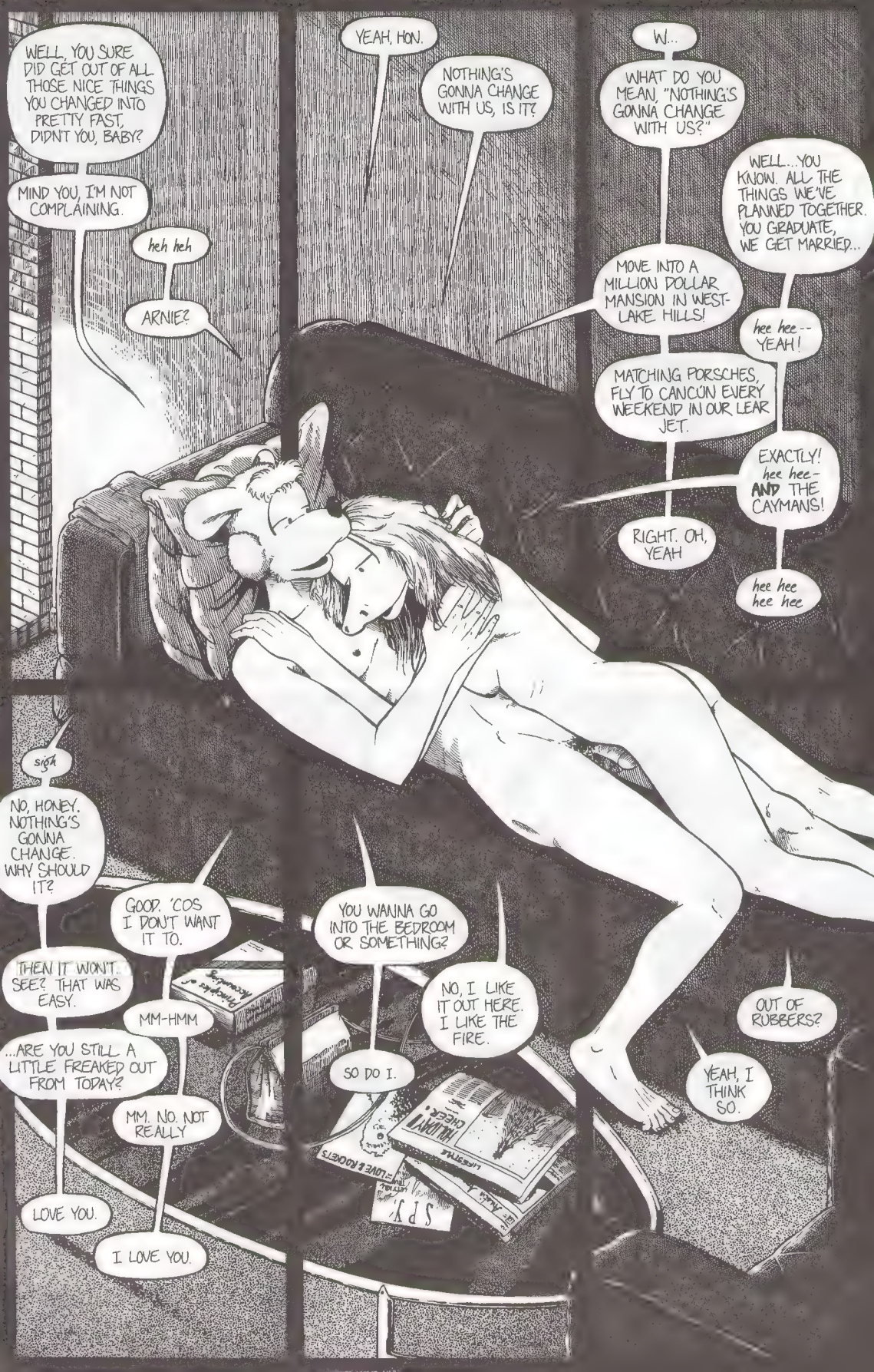
YOU WANNA GO INTO THE BEDROOM OR SOMETHING?

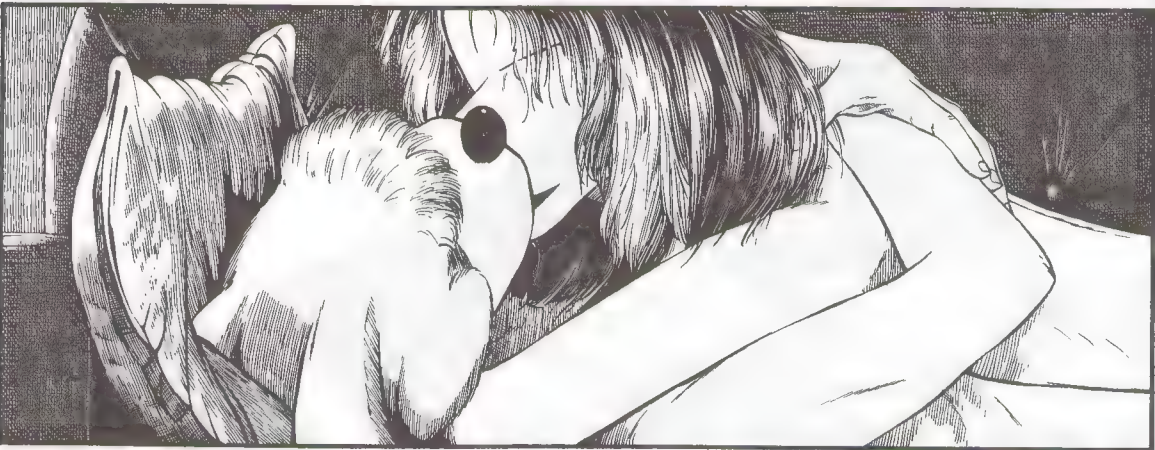
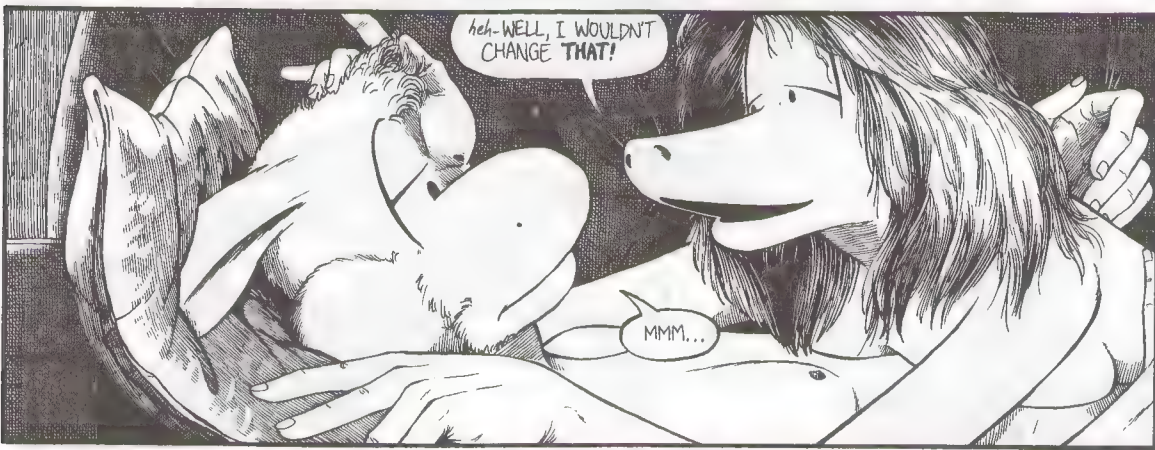
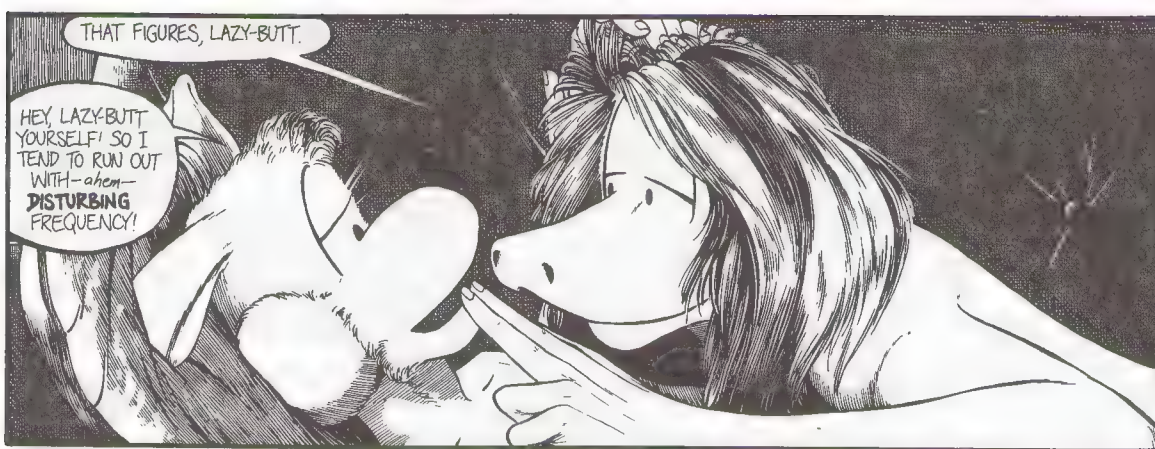
NO, I LIKE IT OUT HERE. I LIKE THE FIRE.

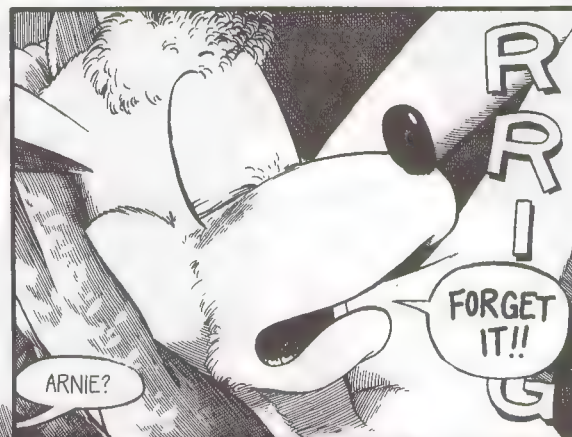
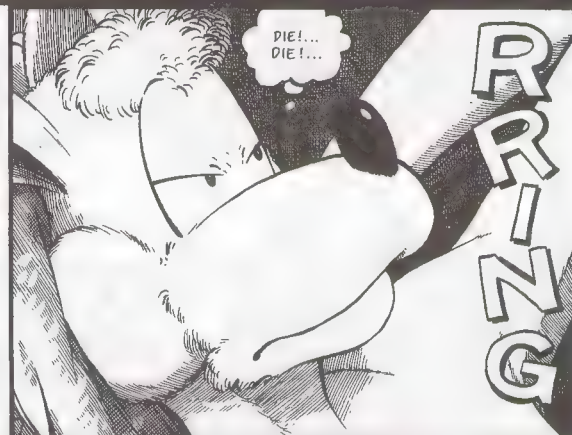
SO DO I.

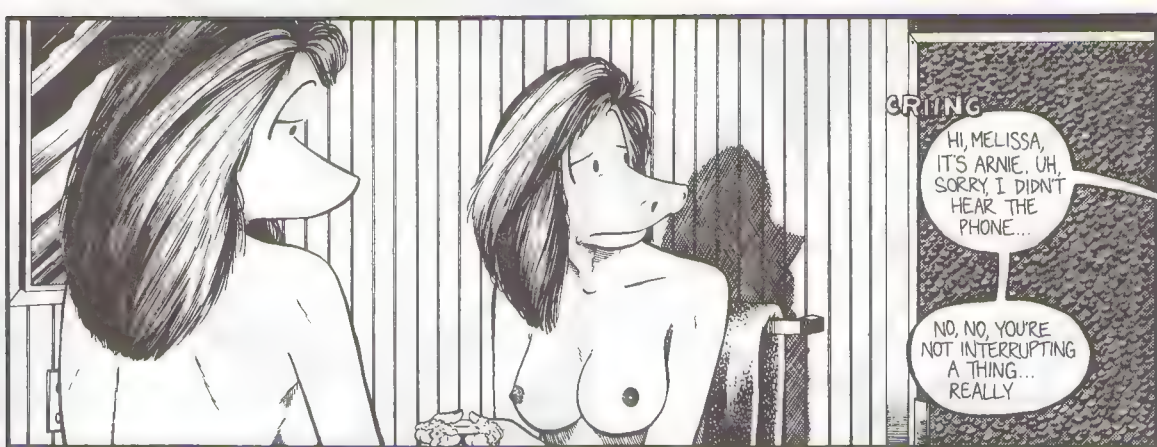
OUT OF RUBBERS?

YEAH, I THINK SO.





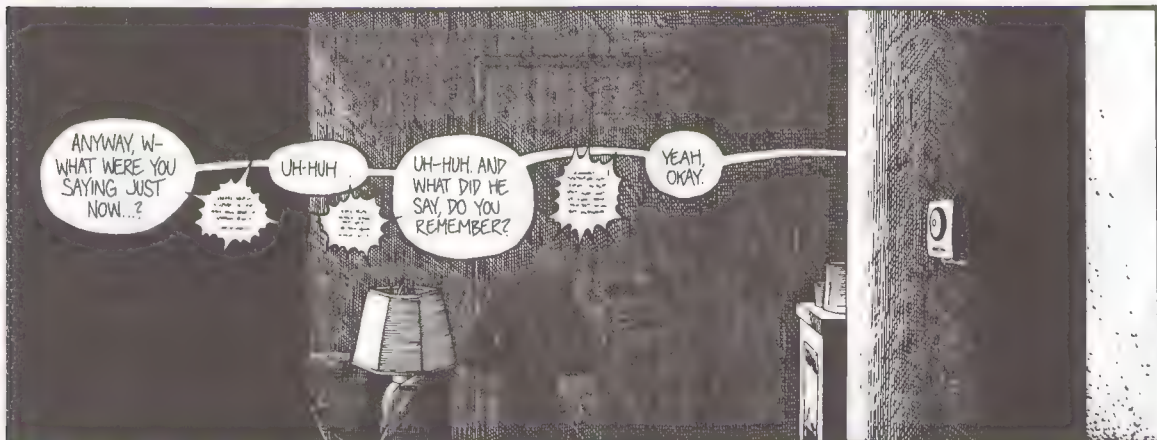




CRING

HI, MELISSA,
IT'S ARNIE. UH,
SORRY I DIDN'T
HEAR THE
PHONE...

NO, NO, YOU'RE
NOT INTERRUPTING
A THING...
REALLY

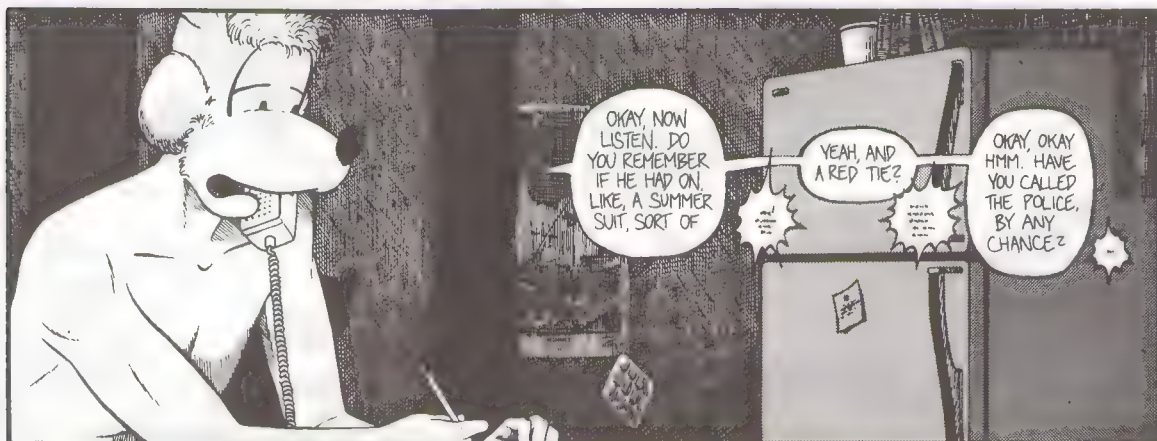


ANYWAY, W-
WHAT WERE YOU
SAYING JUST
NOW. ?

UH-HUH

UH-HUH. AND
WHAT DID HE
SAY, DO YOU
REMEMBER?

YEAH,
OKAY.



OKAY, NOW
LISTEN. DO
YOU REMEMBER
IF HE HAD ON,
LIKE, A SUMMER
SUIT, SORT OF

YEAH, AND
A RED TIE?

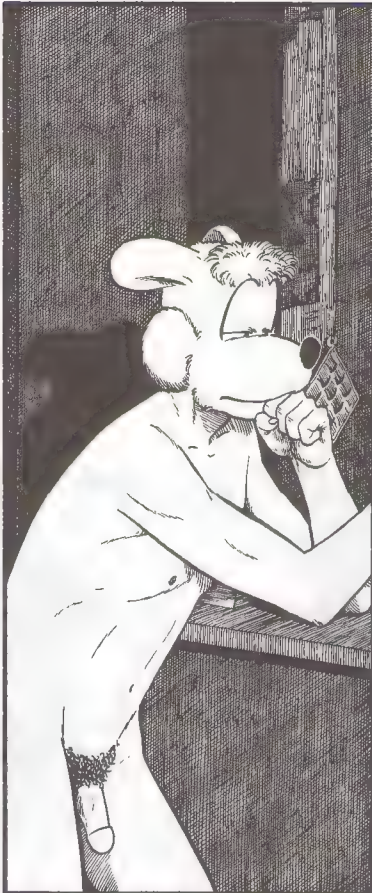
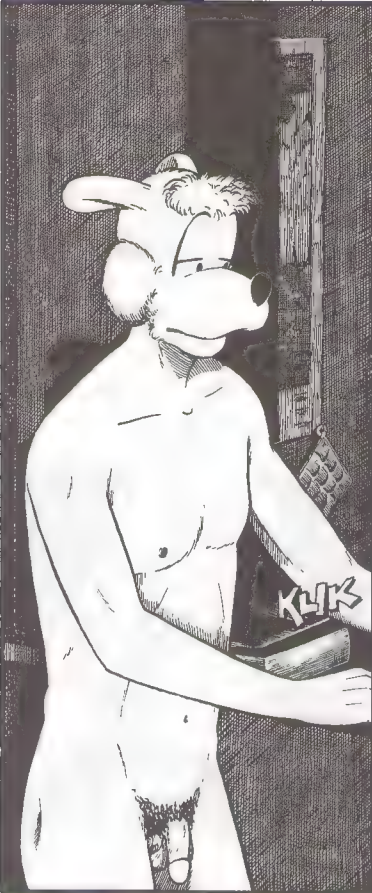
OKAY, OKAY
HMM. HAVE
YOU CALLED
THE POLICE,
BY ANY
CHANCE?



ALL RIGHT,
THAT'S OKAY.
WOULD YOU DO
ME A FAVOR AND
CALL THEM NOW
AND

THAT'S
RIGHT, ERICA
AND I WILL
BE OVER
IN A LITTLE
BIT.

NO, NO, YOU
DID THE RIGHT
THING, MELISSA,
YOU REALLY DID!
THANKS FOR THE
CALL, OKAY... ?
YEAH, BYE-BYE.



M-
HOW DID HE
GET IN?
2



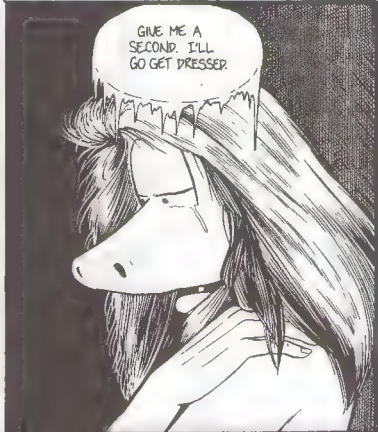
WELL, I GUESS
HE **BROKE IN**,
DIDN'T HE!
WHAT DO YOU
THINK,
WATSON!?



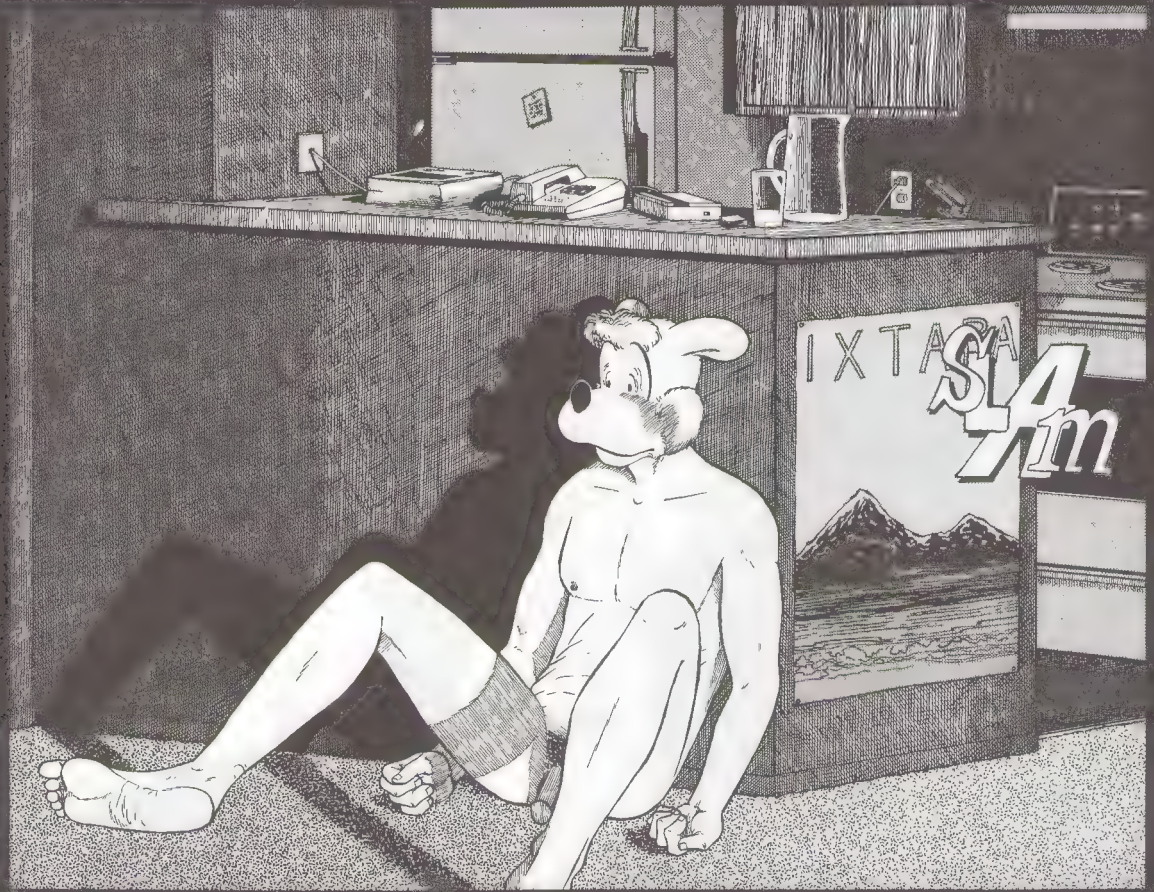
MAYBE HE
PUT ON A
**SANTA
SUIT** AND
CRAWLED DOWN
THE **FUCKING
CHIMNEY!**



I'M SORRY!
I'M SORRY, I'M
SORRY....

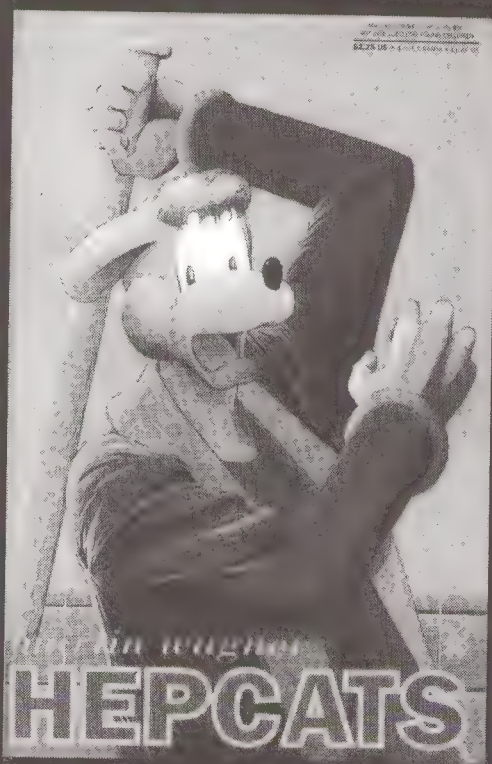


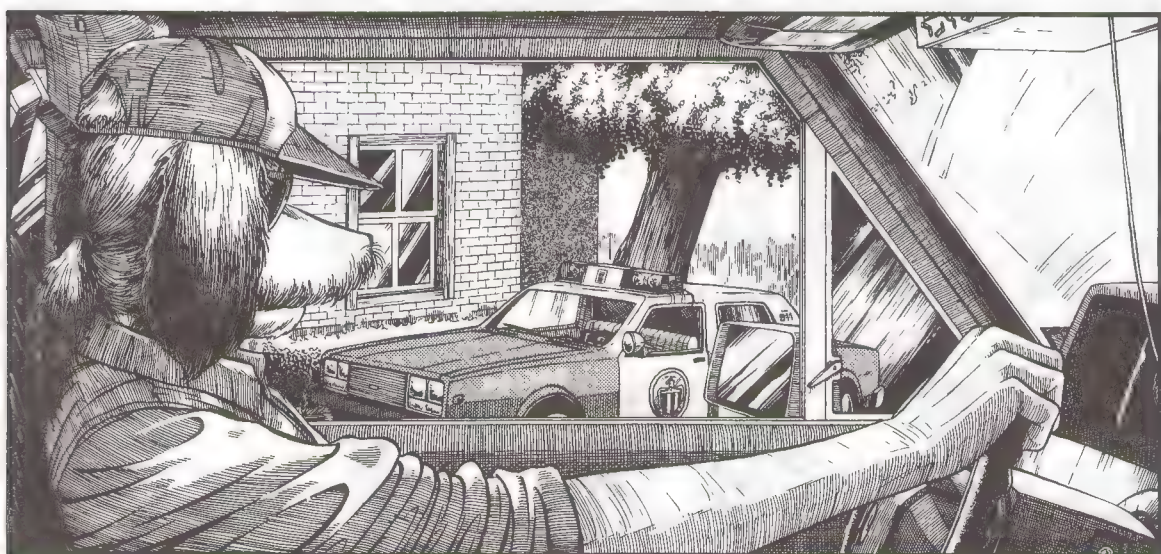
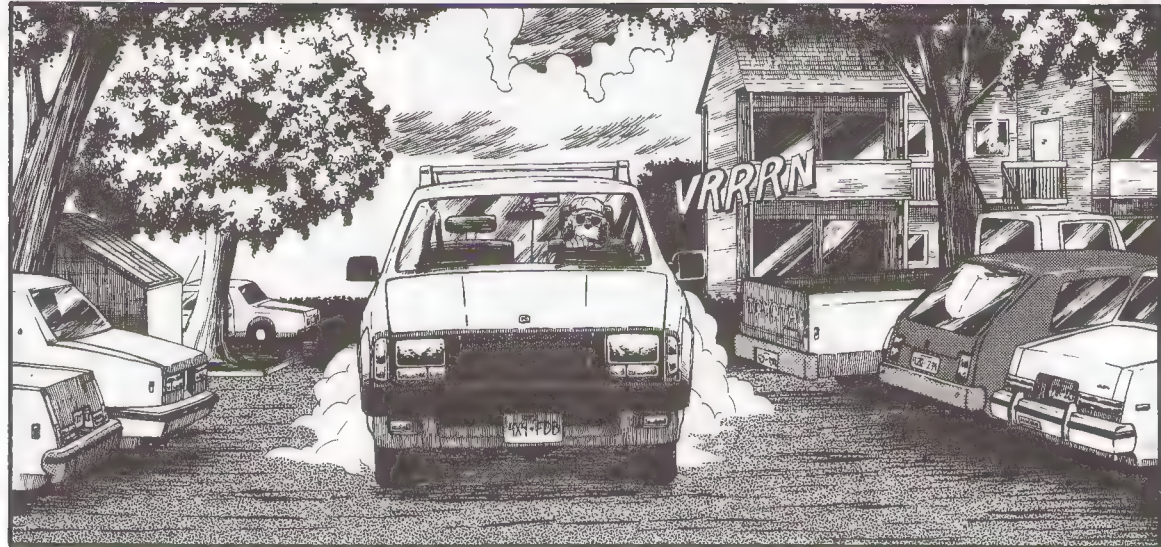
GIVE ME A
SECOND, I'LL
GO GET DRESSER.



CHAPTER VI

Super Heroes

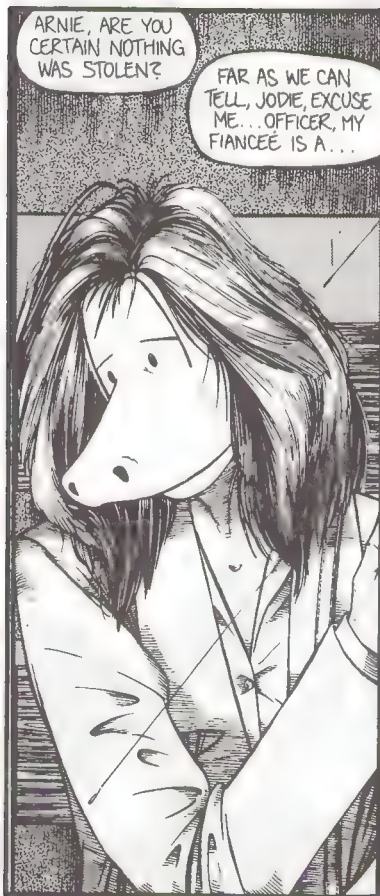






NOW WAITASEC...
YOU'RE SAYING THE GUY
WHO BROKE IN HERE IS
THE SAME GUY WHO
ASSAULTED YOU THIS
AFTERNOON...

AT WEST-
CREEK MALL, YES,
OFFICER, LISTEN,
I...



ARNIE, ARE YOU
CERTAIN NOTHING
WAS STOLEN?

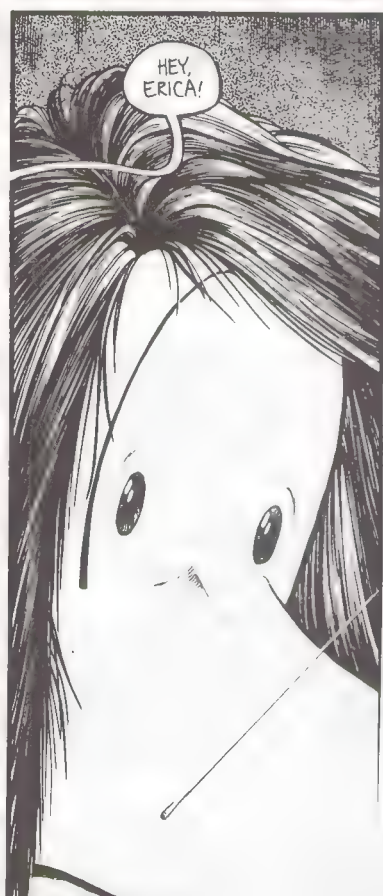
FAR AS WE CAN
TELL, JODIE, EXCUSE
ME... OFFICER, MY
FIANCEE IS A...



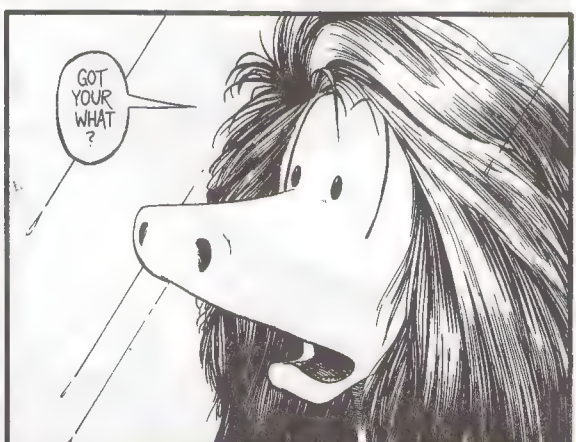
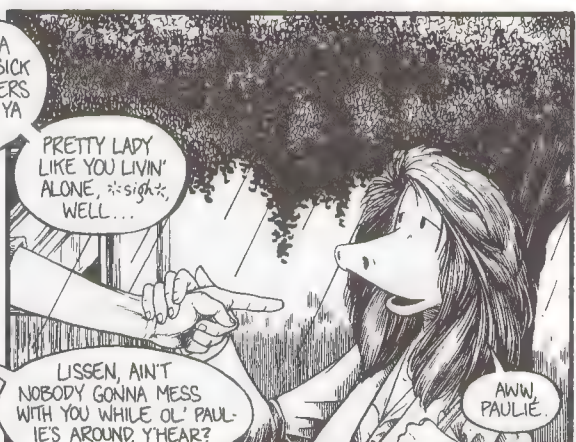
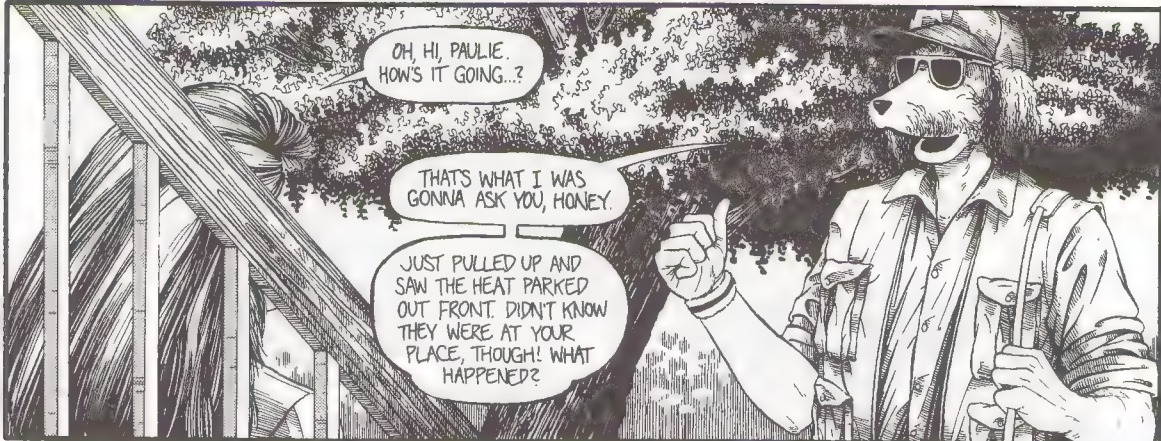
WELL, SHE USED TO BE
A DANCER AT THE
MOUNTAIN OF VENUS...

UH-HUH?

UH, WELL
ANYWAY
SHE TOLD ME
THIS GUY IS
ONE OF HER
REGULARS
WHO'S BEEN
BOTHERING
HER AT THE
CLUB...



HEY,
ERICA!



ALL RIGHT, MR. COARNES.
SORRY THIS HAPPENED. WE'LL
BE IN TOUCH IN A DAY OR TWO.

UH, 'FORE WE GO, 'S'ERE
ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN
THINK OF THAT MEBBE
WE OUGHTA KNOW, 'FORE
WE, UH, LEAVE?

KA-LAK

HANG ON, OFFICER,
I'LL CHECK.

GOOD CHANCE
THIS GUY HAS PRIORS,
JERRY.

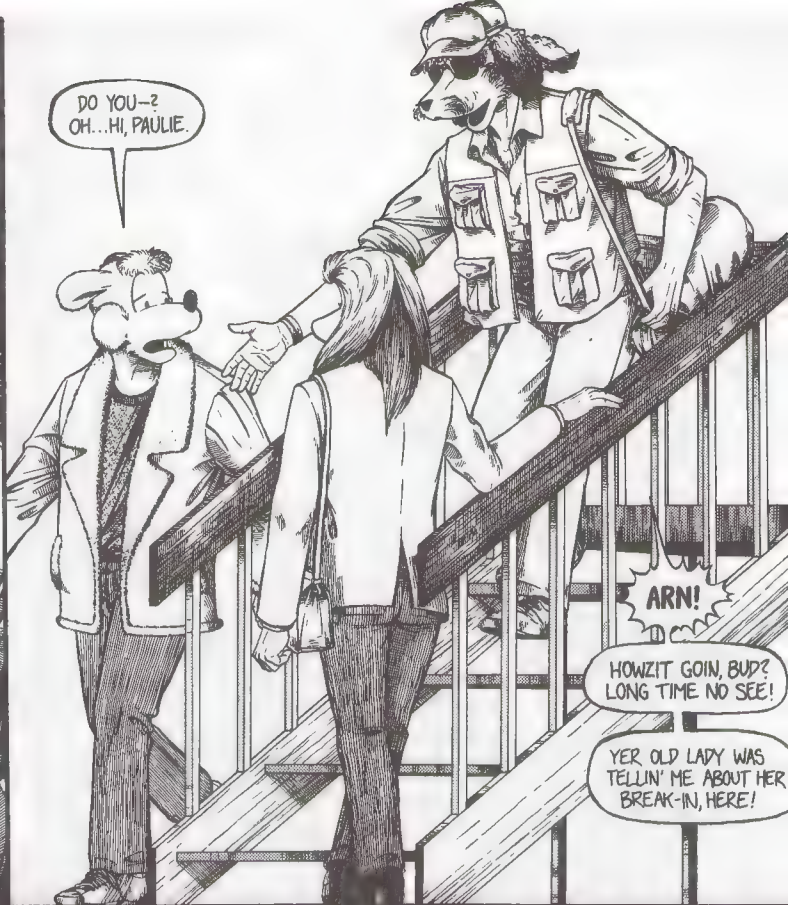
HE WENT THROUGH
THAT LOCK LIKE CRAP
THROUGH A GOOSE!

Heck Yeah!



COULDN'T
GET A
CLEAN SET
O' FEATS,
THOUGH.

ERICA?



DO YOU--?
OH...HI, PAULIE.

ARN!

HOWZIT GOIN, BUD?
LONG TIME NO SEE!

YER OLD LADY WAS
TELLIN' ME ABOUT HER
BREAK-IN, HERE!



UH, YEAH, WELL,
IT WAS, UH...

PAULIE'S BEEN
TELLING ME ABOUT
HIS UZI.

YEAH! SWEETEST
ADDITION TO MY COL-
LECTION SINCE
THAT CIVIL WAR
MUSKET!

'COURSE
NOW WE GOT
A BURGLAR
AROUND, I'D
BETTER HIDE
'ER AWAY,
HUH?



JESUS CHR—I

HOW THE HELL
DID YOU GET YOUR
HANDS ON AN
UZI!?

AWW, YOU CAN GET A
SEMI-AUTOMATIC ANYWHERE.
BUT IF YOU KNOW THE RIGHT
PEOPLE...

HELL, I
BETTER COOL
IT WITH THESE
COPS AROUND,
heh heh...



HEY, Y'ALL WANNA COME
UP AN' SEE IT? I CAN--

NO, ACTUALLY,
PAULIE, TODAY'S NOT
REAL GOOD. MAYBE
...

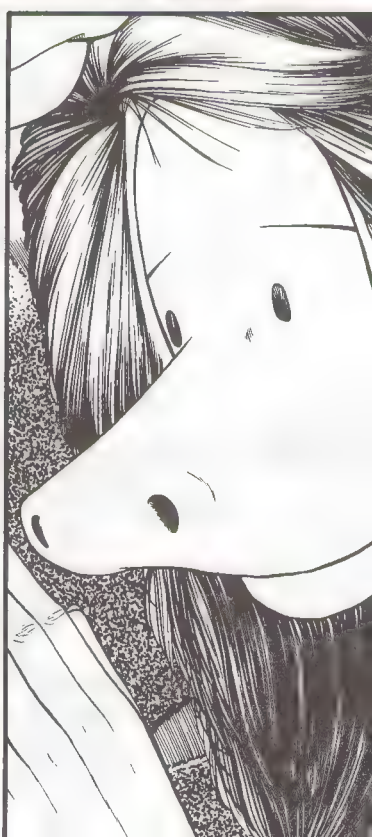
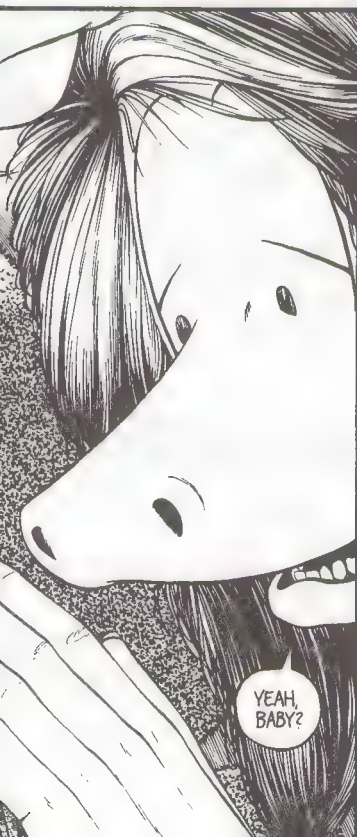
OH... *heh*, YEAH,
OBVIOUSLY. WELL,
LISSEN, ERICA! IF I
SEE ANYBODY MESSIN'
AROUND YOUR PLACE,
I'LL GIVE 'EM A NINE-
MILLIMETER ENEMA,
Y'HEAR?

THAT'S VERY
SWEET, PAULIE.

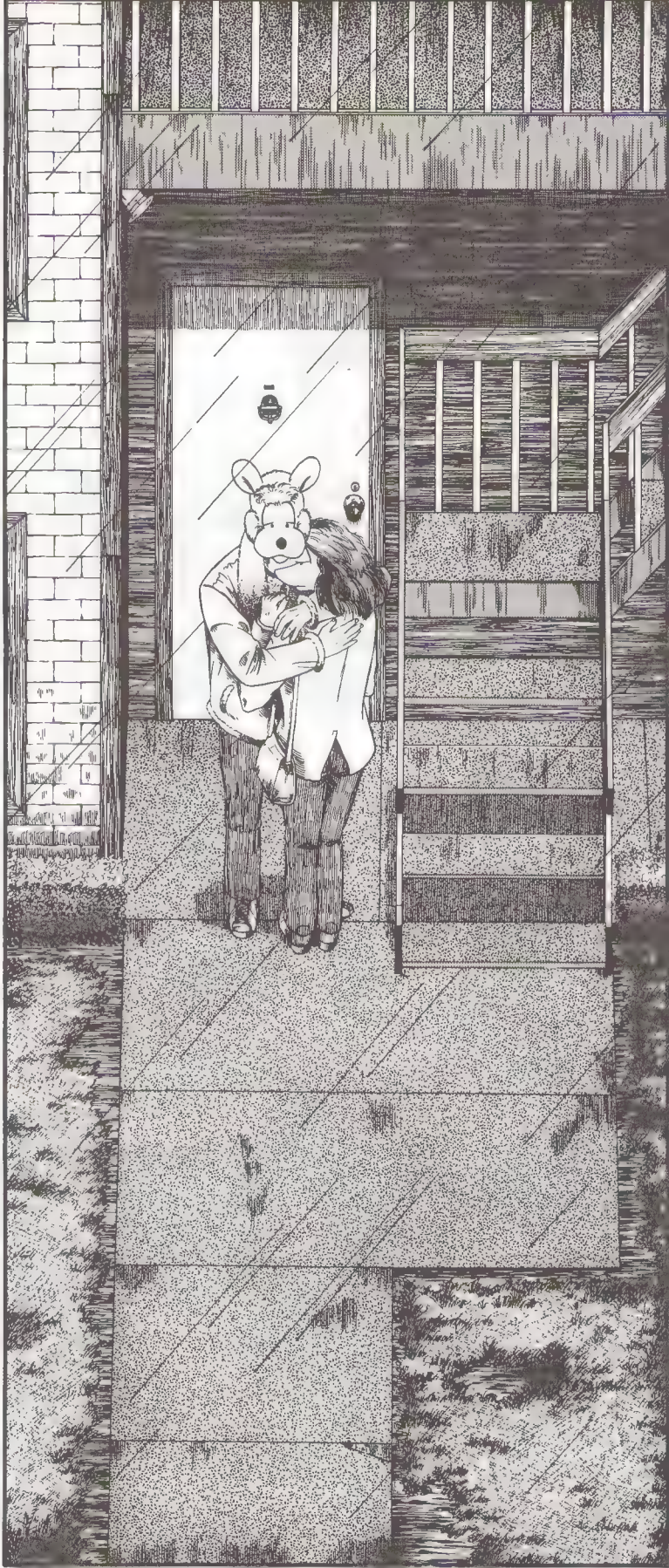
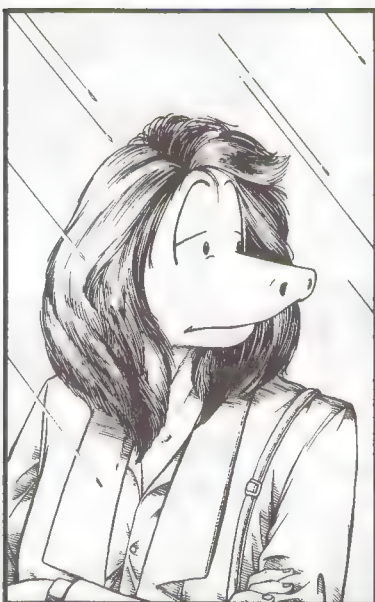
SEE YA
'ROUND,
PAULIE..!

sigh

ERICA...









NOK
NOK
NOK

YOU'RE LISTENING
TO KROZ!... AUSTIN'S
ROCK CONNECTION!
3 2 1 KZ-102.1!

AH, HELL...
COMIIING!

HANG
ON!

FA-LUSH

SHHSHHSHHSHHSHHSSSS

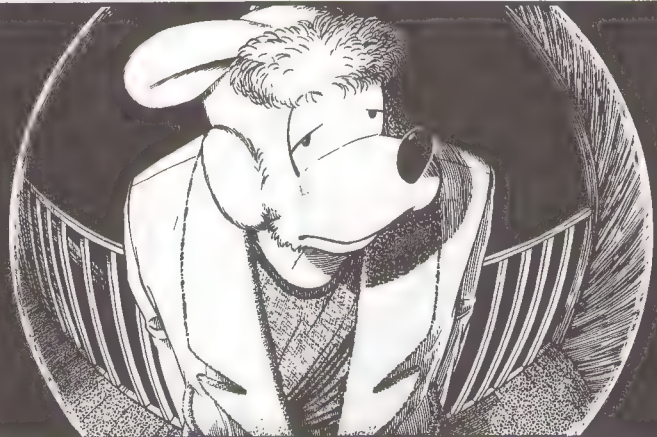
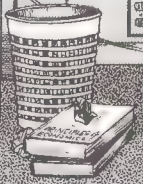
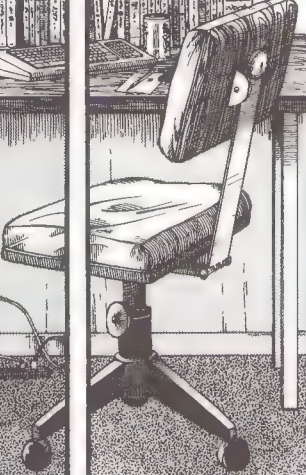
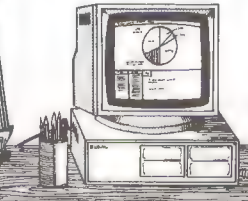
JIGGLE
JIGGLE
JIGGLE

TONK

ZZZZZZP

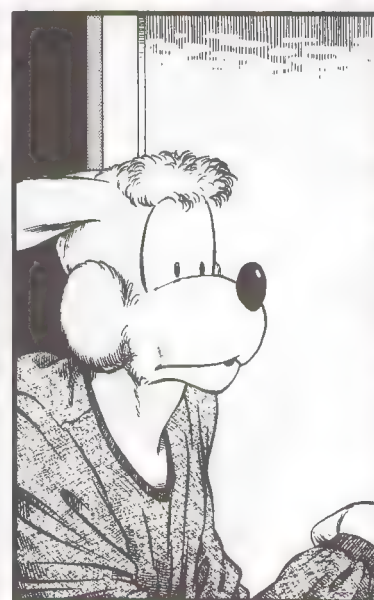
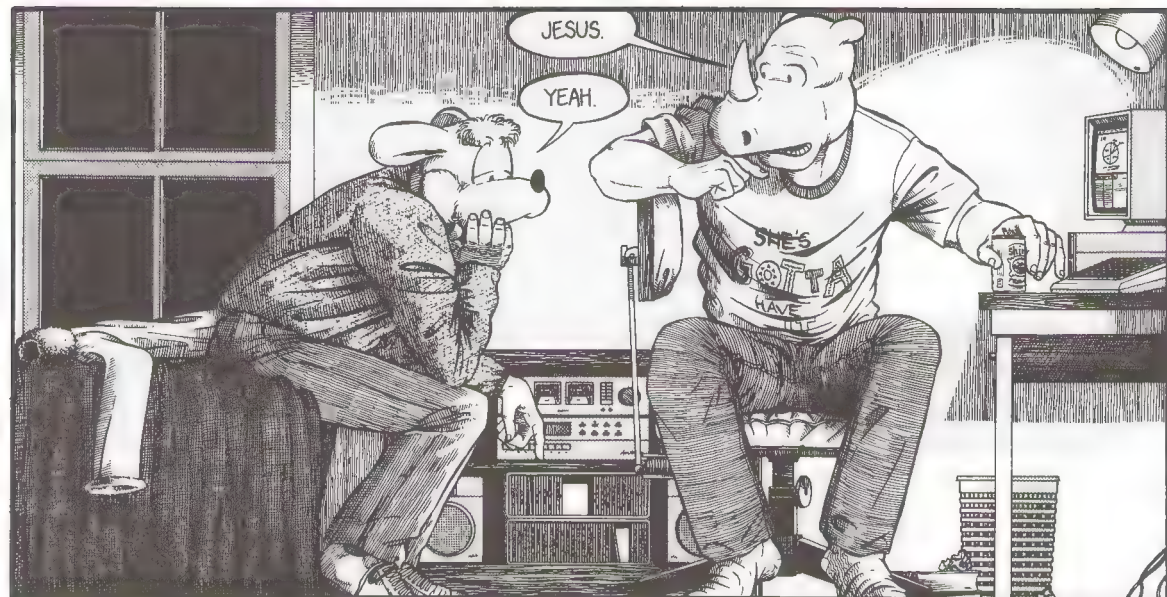
COMING!

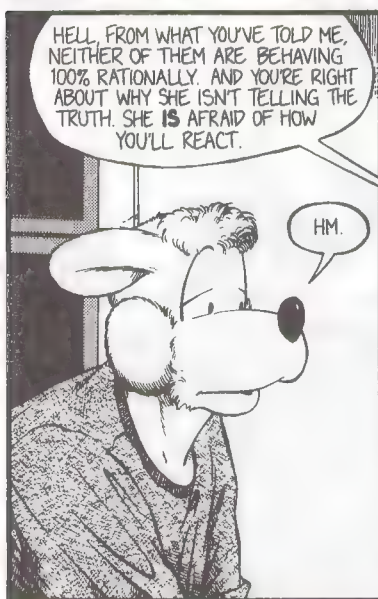
ENEMY

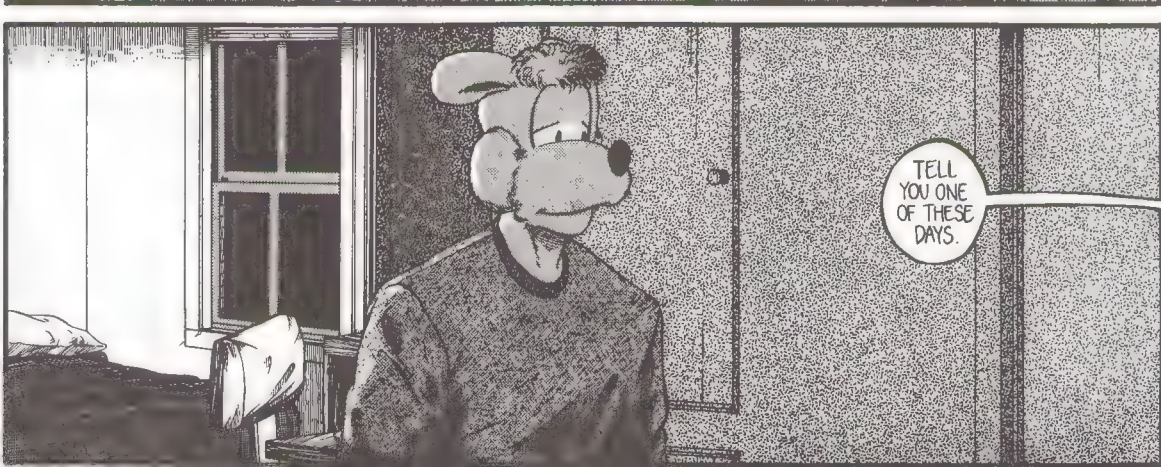
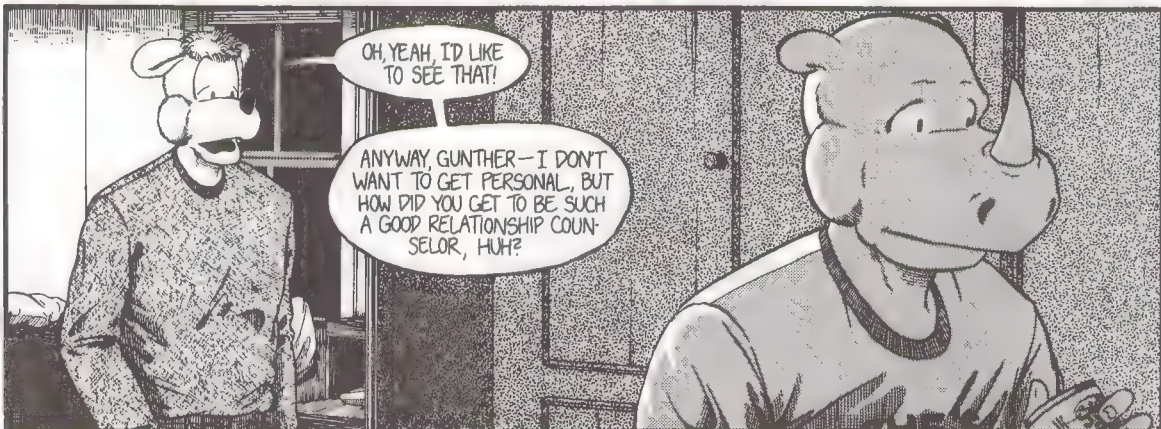
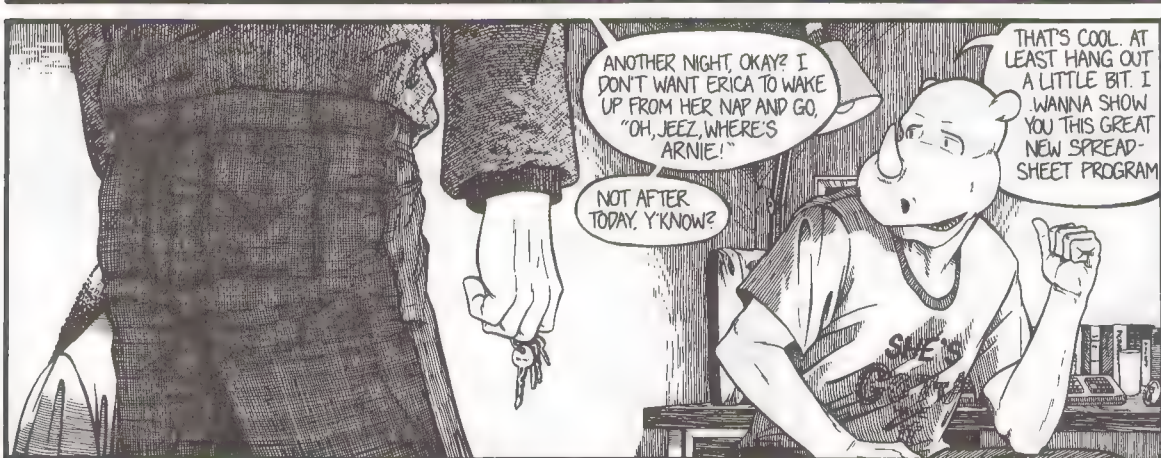
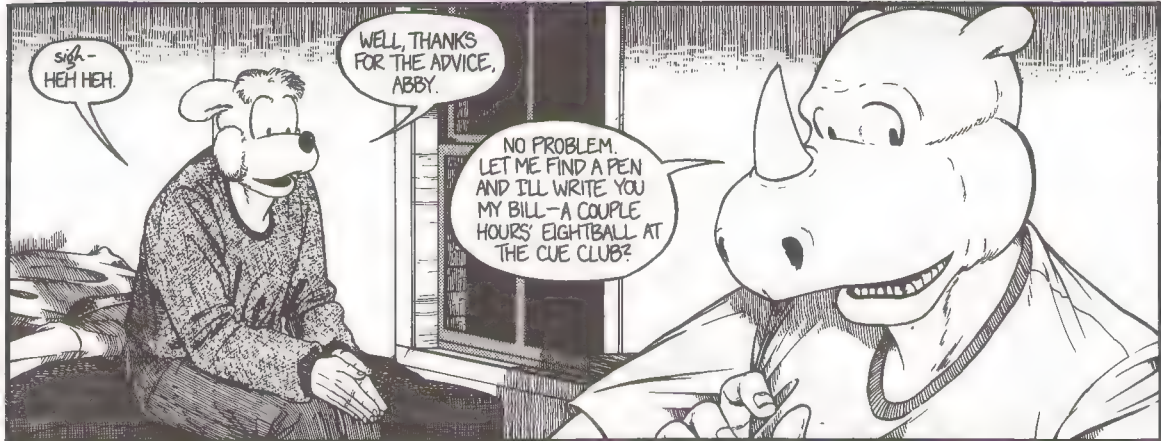


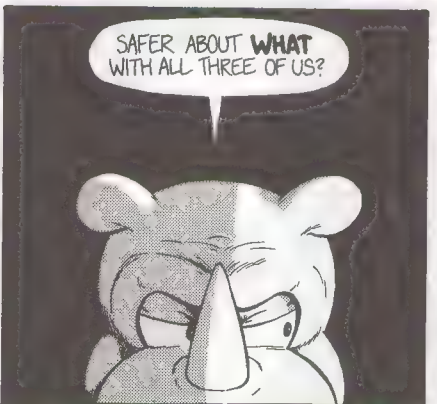
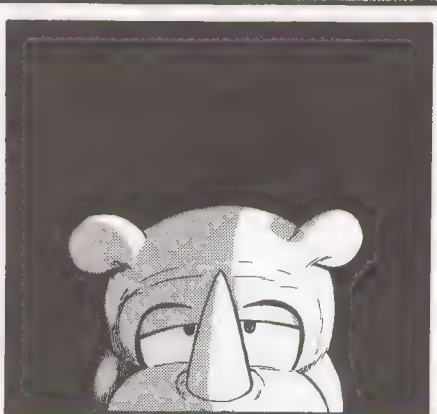
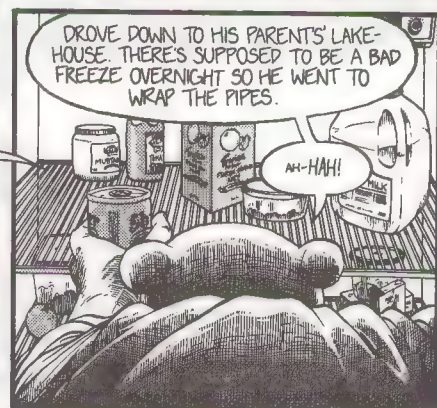
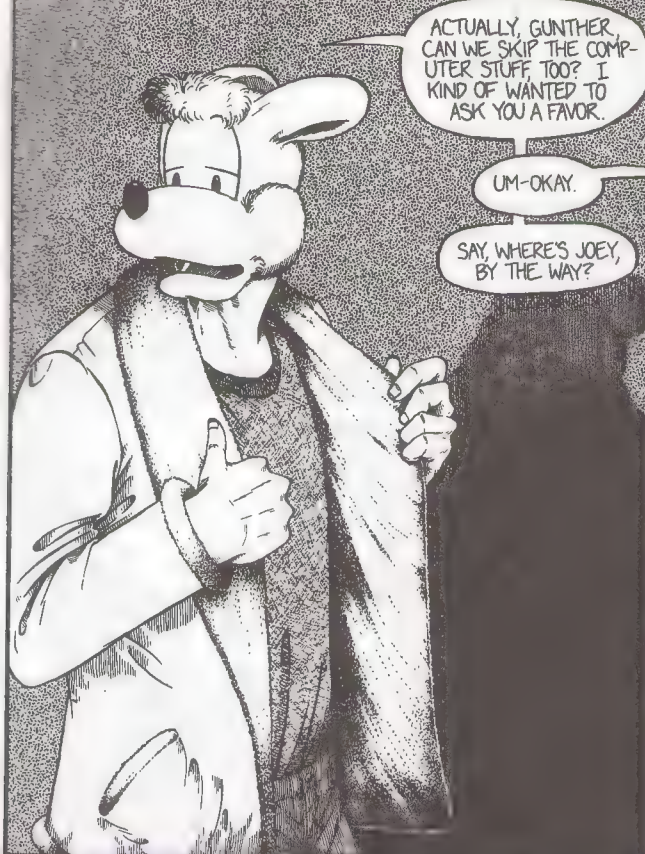
ARNIE!

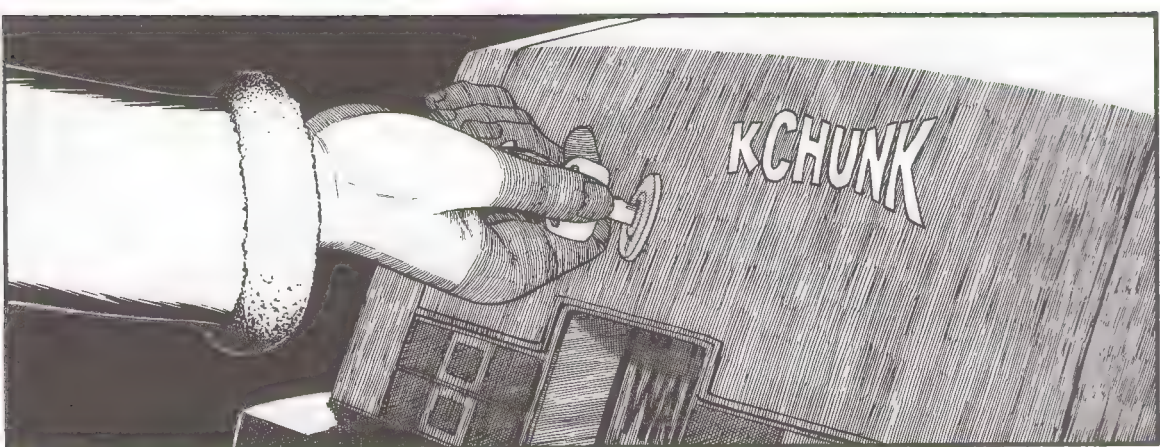
KLIK LAK

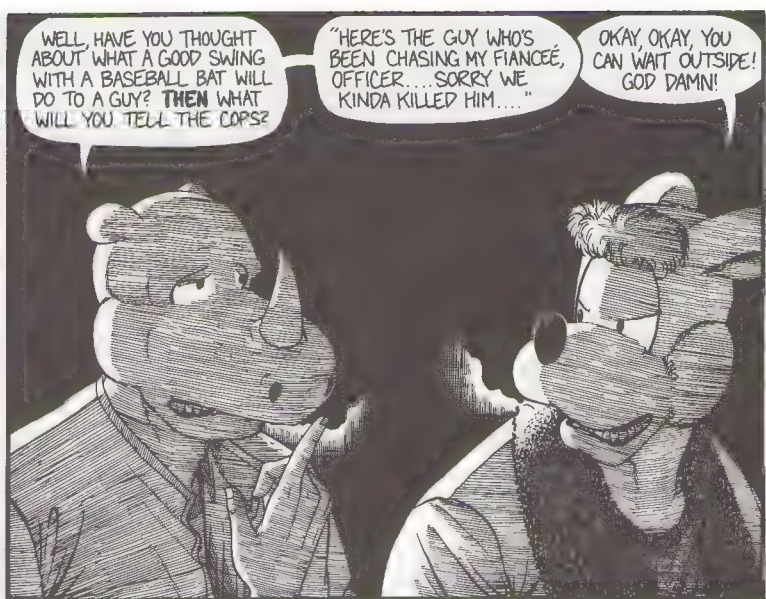
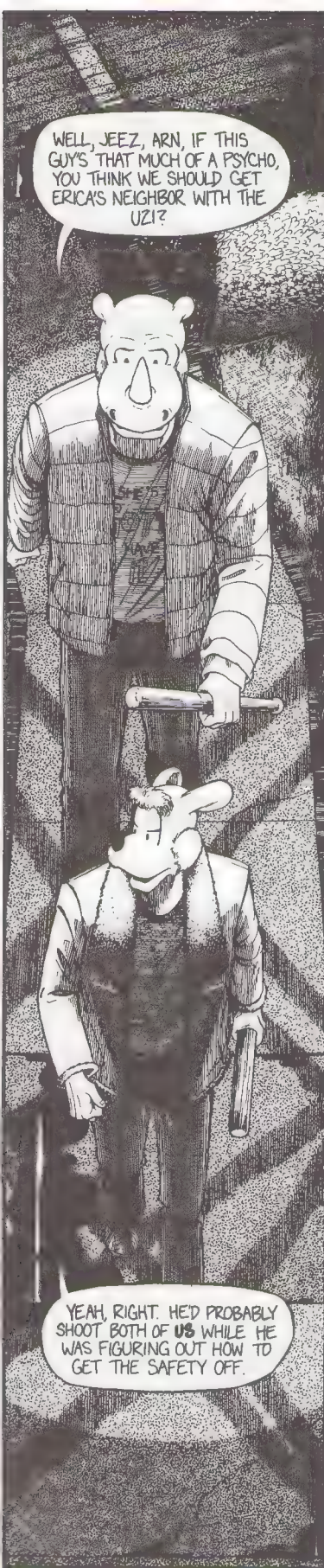




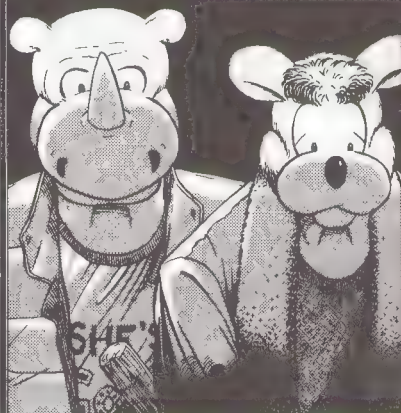








KLAK



SQUEEEEEE

THERE! YOU SEE?
NOBODY'S HERE.

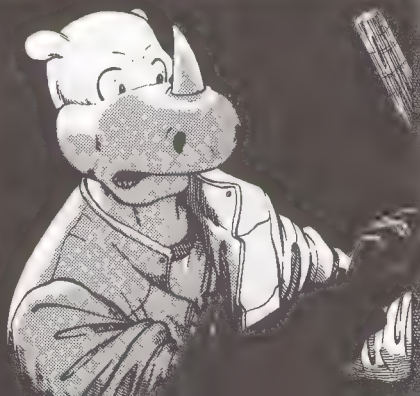
GO GET THE CLOTHES!

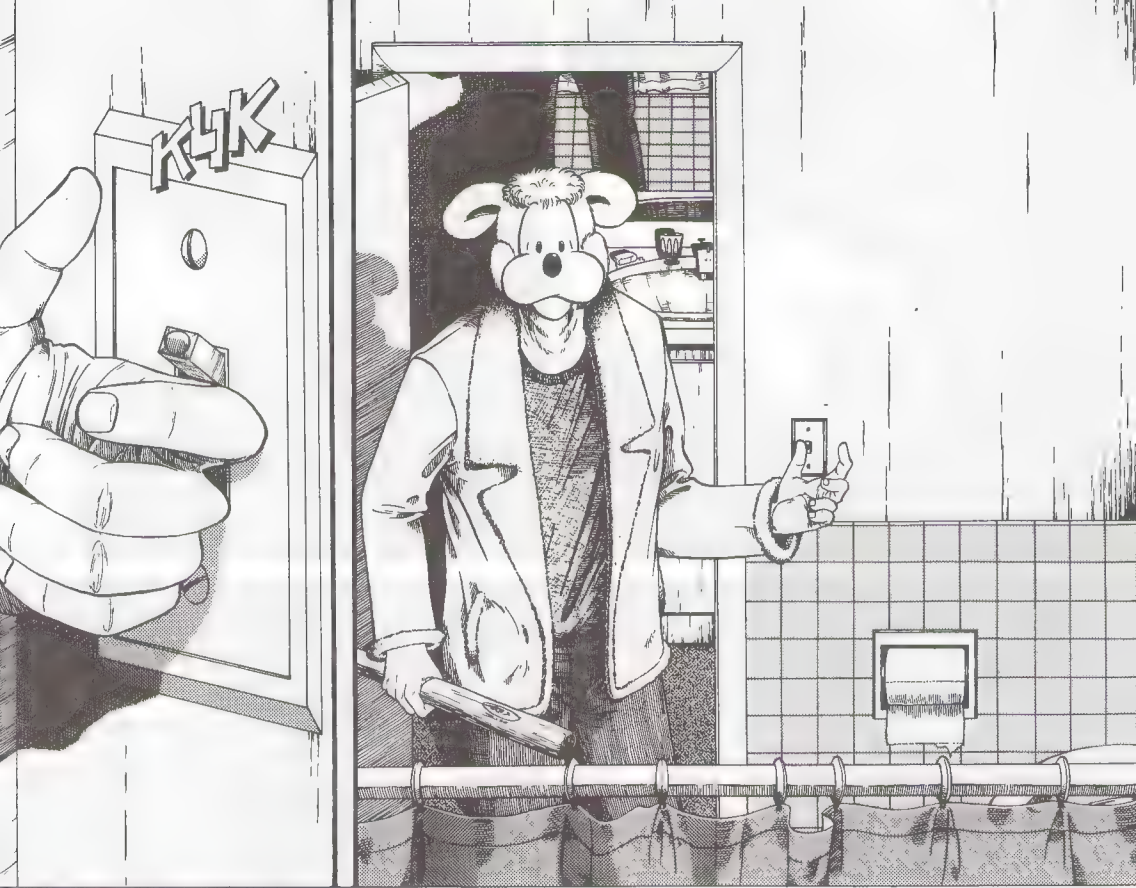


YOU CHECK THE
BEDROOM WHILE I
CHECK THE BATHROOM.

-WHAT?!

ARNIE!



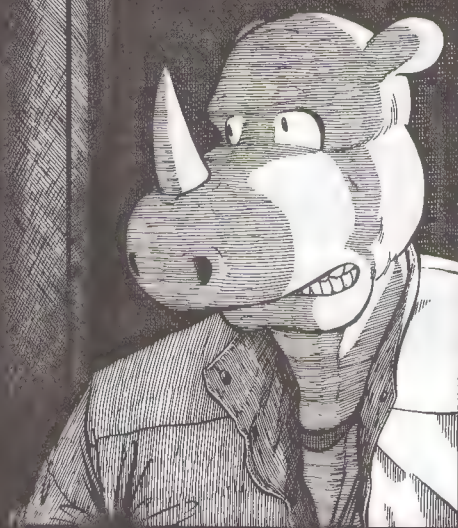


A close-up of a hand in a light-colored sleeve knocking a round doorknob on a dark wooden door.

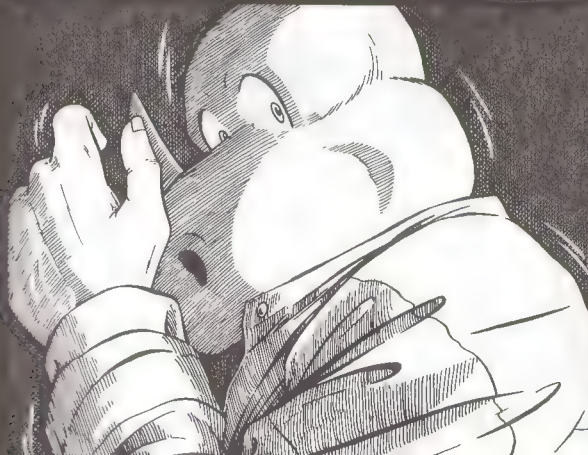
KLAK

A rhinoceros with a white stripe on its face is peeking out from a dark doorway, showing its teeth in a grin.

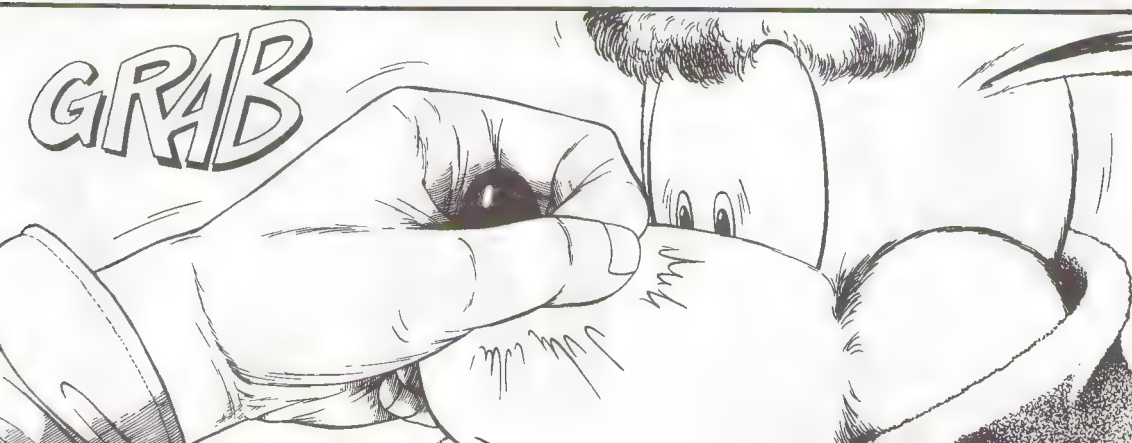
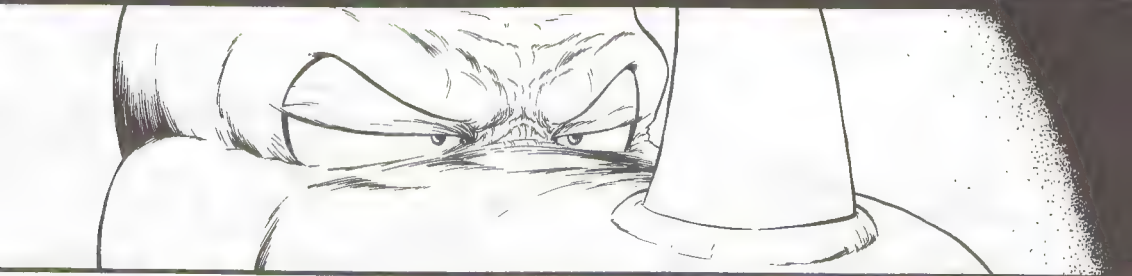
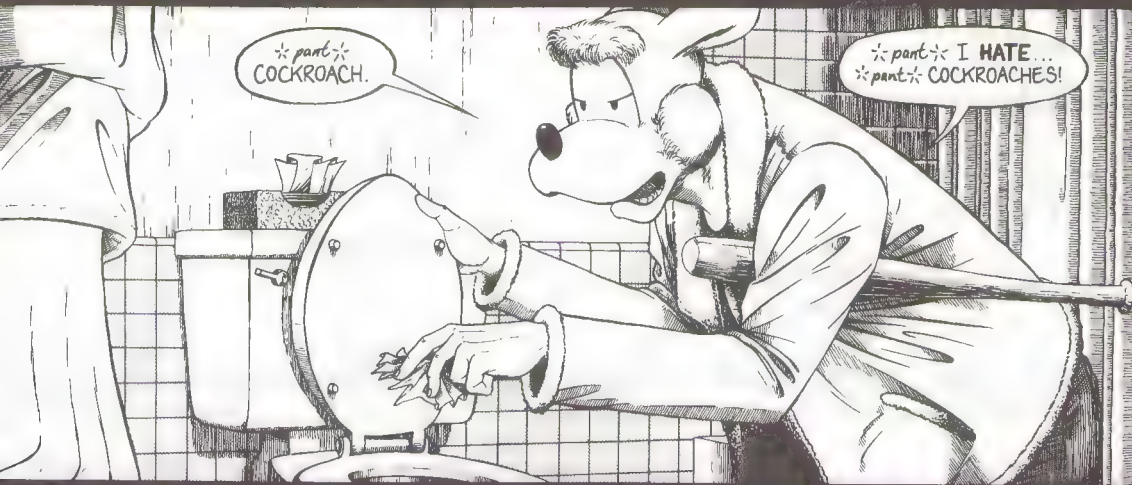
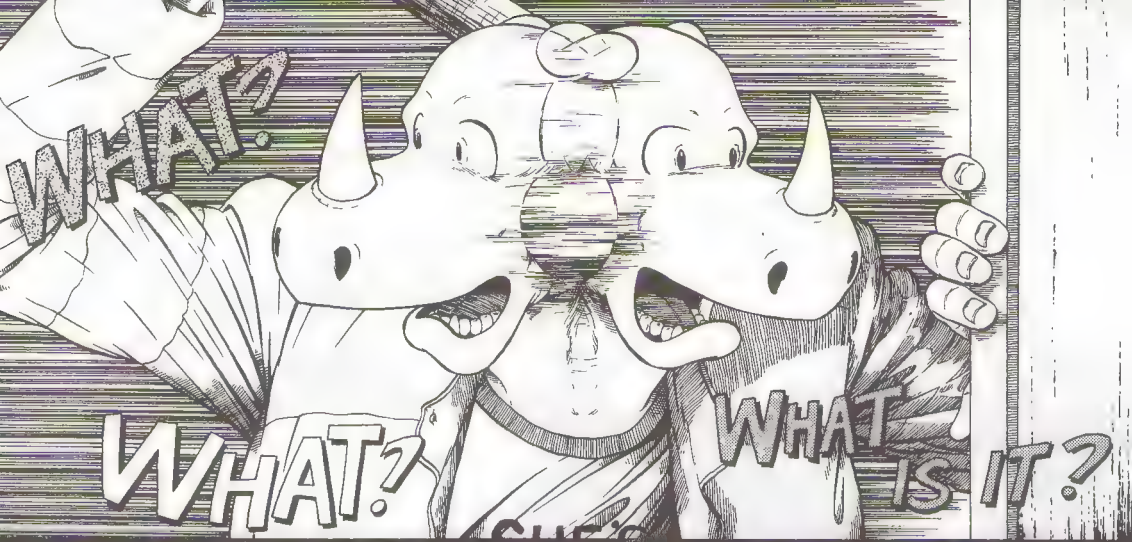
CREEEEEEEEAK!

A rhinoceros with a white stripe on its face is peeking out from a dark doorway, holding a wooden stick. A speech bubble is next to it.

HELLO?

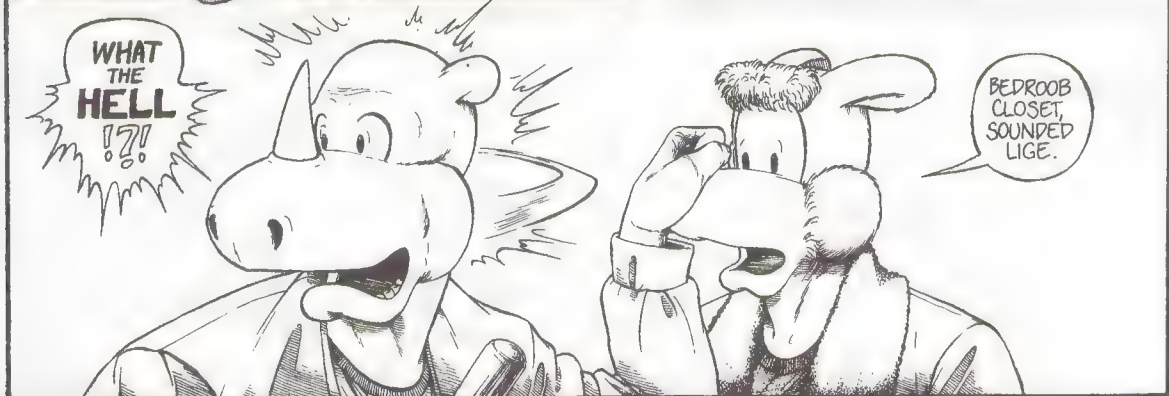
A rhinoceros with a white stripe on its face is peeking out from a dark doorway, holding a wooden stick.

SHIT!
BAM
BAM





HUM



WELL, COME ON, LET'S GO CHECK IT OUT.

FUCK YOU!

GUNTHER, IT'S PROBABLY NOTHING. BUT IF IT'S NOT NOTHING WE SHOULD HAVE A LOOK.

ARNIE, I'VE HAD A GUN POINTED AT ME BEFORE! IT'S NO FUN, OKAY?

WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT GUNS HERE?

LOOK, IF SOMEBODY'S IN THAT CLOSET, HE HAS TO KNOW WE'RE HERE.

WELL, NO SHIT!

THEN HE'S PROBABLY STANDING THERE HOLDING A PISTOL AT EYE LEVEL WAITING TO WASTE THE FIRST POOR SLOB THAT OPENS THE DOOR, LIKE THAT DUDE AT THE END OF BLUE VELVET!

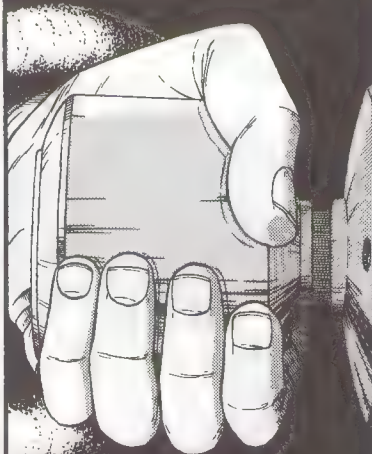
WELL, THE ONLY REASON HE'D KNOW WE'RE HERE IS 'COS OF THAT DAMN RACKET YOU MADE!

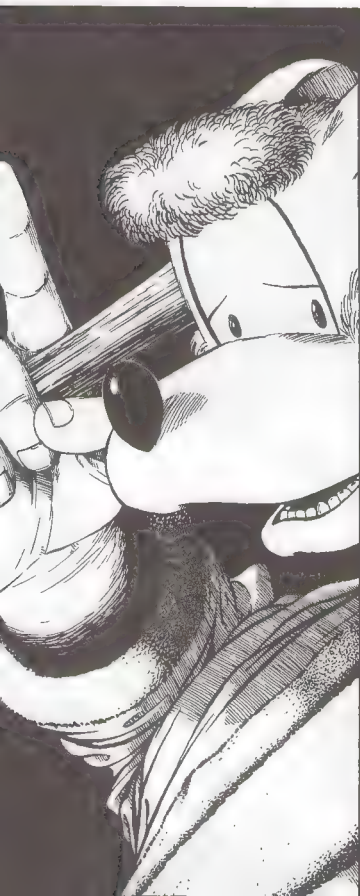
JUST SHUT UP, OKAY?

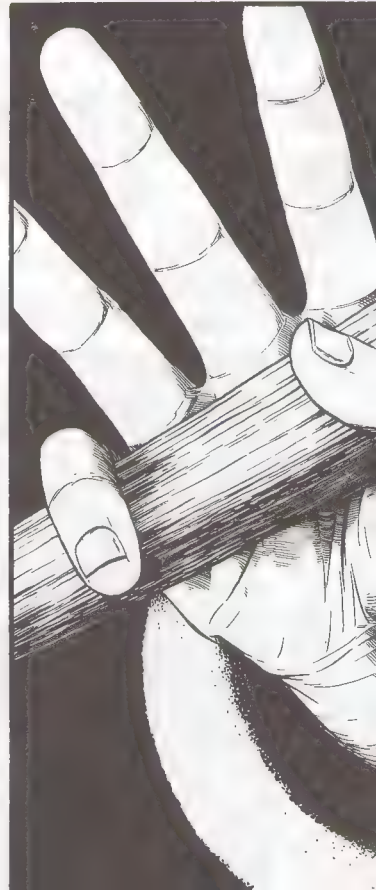
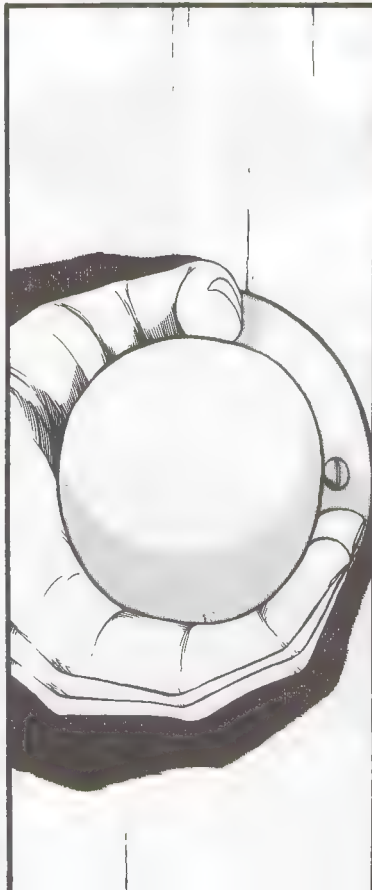
-RACKET I MADE!?- WHAT ABOUT YOU CLUBBING A COCKROACH TO DEATH WITH THE LOUISVILLE SLUGGER!?

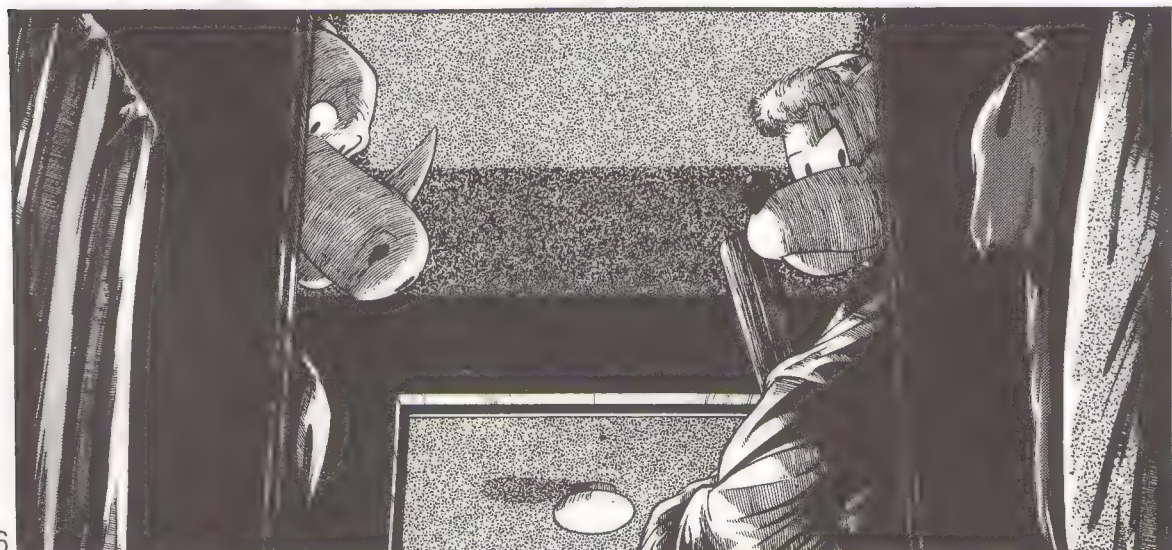
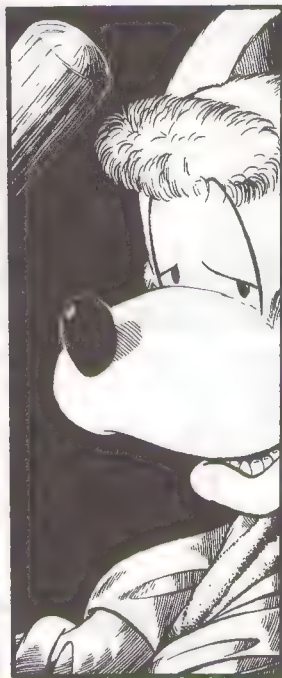
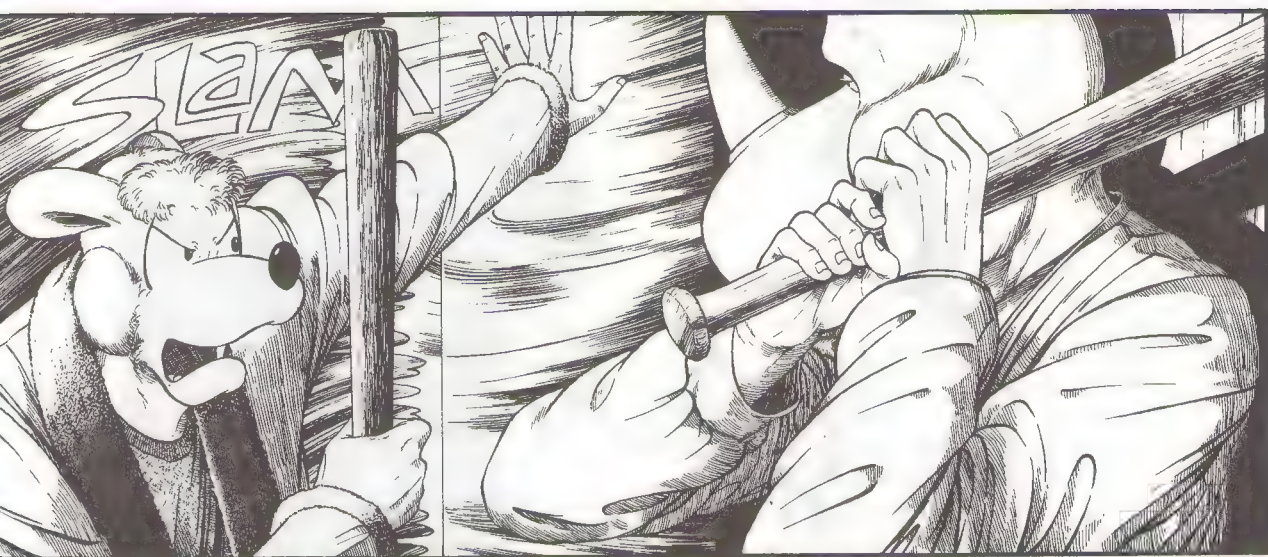
OKAY... I JUST THINK WE OUGHT TO SPLIT, THAT'S ALL...

SHHH!









RRIIING

RRIIING

...HUNH?

RRIII-

KLIK

H-yawn-
HELLO?

HI-IT'S ME.

PLEASE DON'T
HANG UP!

sigh-

WHAT DO YOU
WANT, KEVIN?

WELL, THE FIRST
THING I WANT IS TO
APOLOGIZE.

I MEAN, TODAY
DIDN'T GO VERY
WELL, DID IT?

OH, REALLY!? HOW WAS IT
SUPPOSED TO GO!?

YOU HAVE EVERY
RIGHT IN THE WORLD
TO BE ANGRY, KATH-
RYN, OKAY, I'M NOT-

TIK

ERICA.

HUH?

I'M NOT KATHRYN ANY-
MORE, OKAY? I'M ERICA
NOW.

EXCUSE ME.

ERICA.

THANK YOU.

WELL, I AM SORRY.
SERIOUSLY. I NEVER
WOULDN'T HURT YOUR
BOYFRIEND, OR WHOEVER
THE HELL HE WAS. HE
JUST, YOU KNOW, WENT
NUTS AND-

JUST LET IT
GO, KEVIN, LET IT
GO.

WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL HIM WHO I WAS IN THE ALLEY?

BECAUSE.

OH, OF COURSE. SHOULD HAVE FIGURED **THAT** OUT—
SILLY OF—

KEVIN, JUST TELL ME WHY YOU'RE **HERE**. ALL RIGHT? AM I IN TROUBLE? IS THAT WHY YOU'RE TRACKING ME DOWN—LIKE SOME DETECTIVE?

NO, YOU'RE NOT IN TROUBLE.

OKAY...

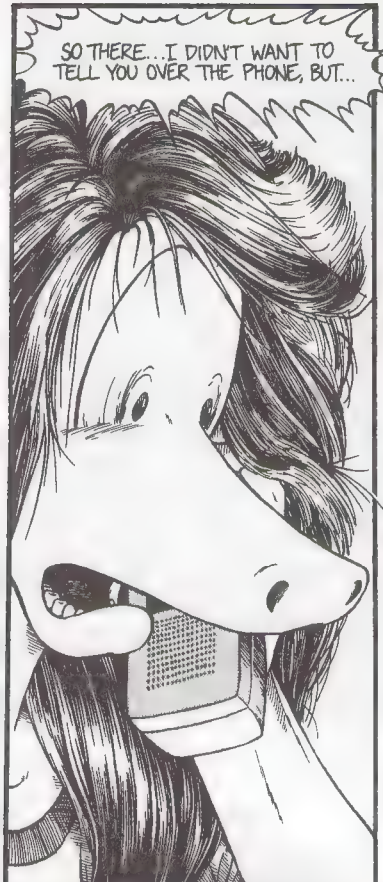
AND IT WOULD BE BETTER IF WE GOT TOGETHER TO TALK SOME THINGS OVER.

LIKE?

DAMMIT, KEVIN!
I DON'T WANT TO PLAY 20 FUCKING QUESTIONS WITH YOU!

ANNEKE WANTS TO SEE YOU.

SO THERE...I DIDN'T WANT TO
TELL YOU OVER THE PHONE, BUT...



YOU THERE?

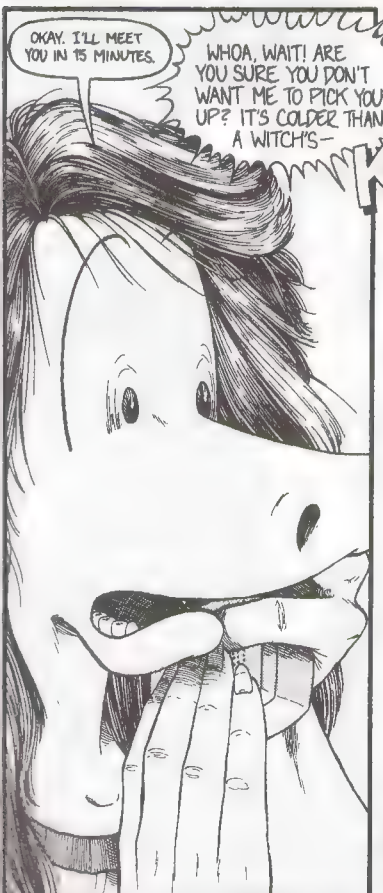


...I NEED...TO...
TO GIVE YOU
DIRECTIONS...



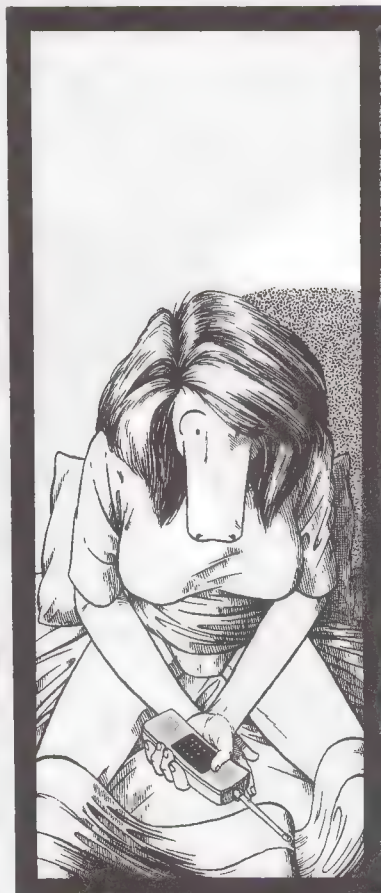
NOW!?...UH, I,
ACTUALLY, I KNOW
WHERE YOU ARE. I'M,
UH, AT THE SUPER-
MARKET AROUND
THE CORNER.....

OKAY. I'LL MEET
YOU IN 15 MINUTES.



WHOA, WAIT! ARE
YOU SURE YOU DON'T
WANT ME TO PICK YOU
UP? IT'S COLDER THAN
A WITCH'S-

KLICK





CHAPTER VII

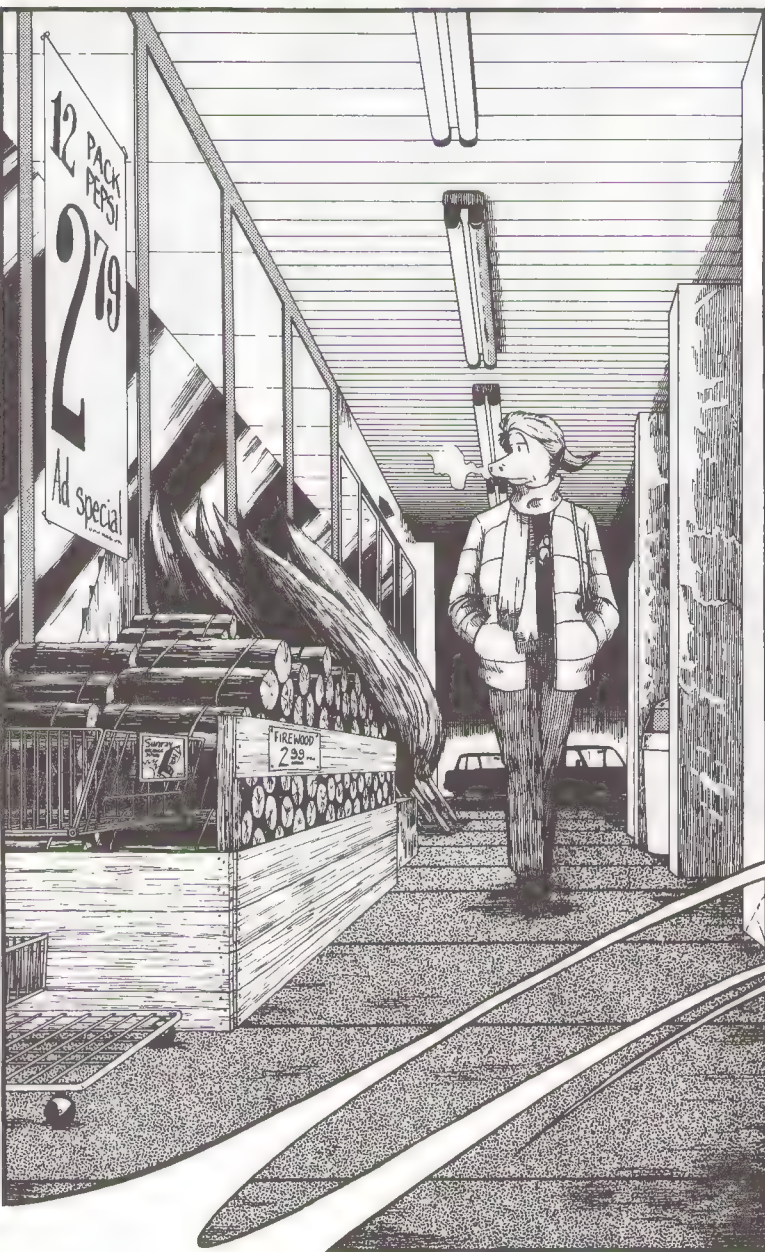
Kevin &
Kathryn

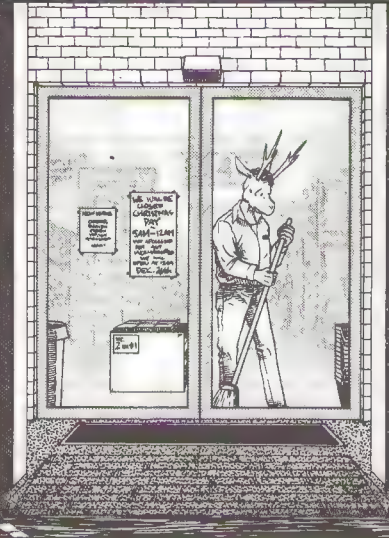
HEPCATS

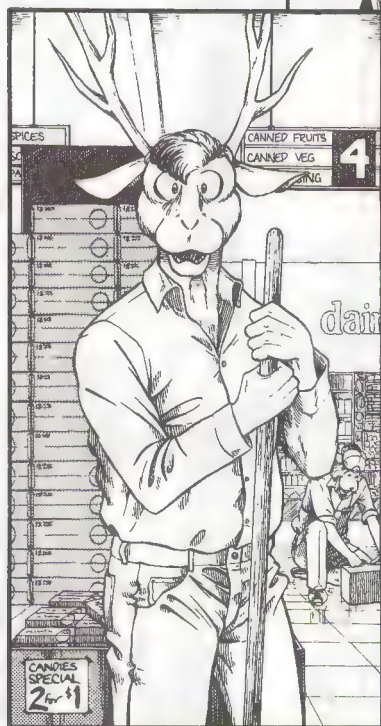
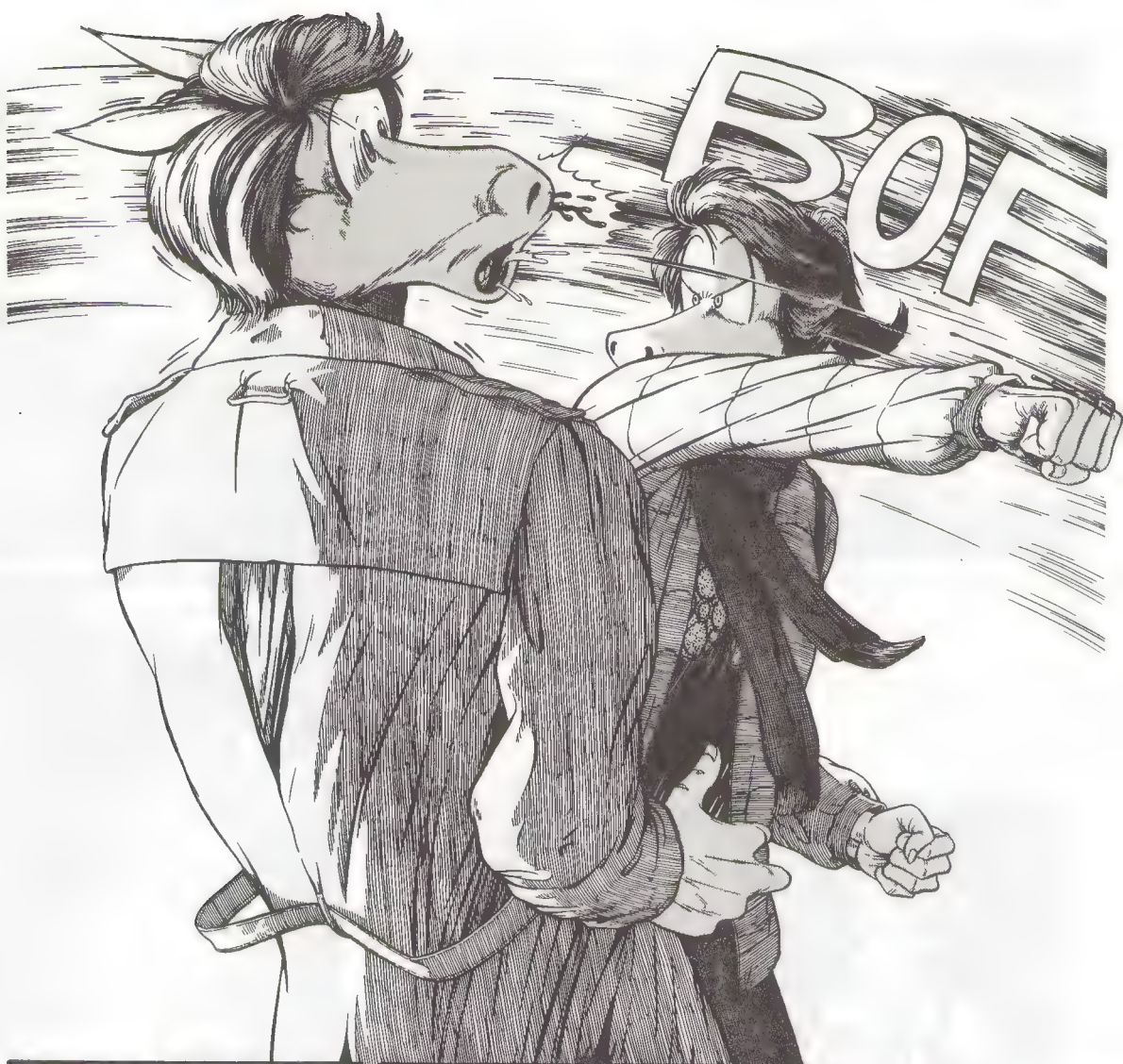
MARTIN WAGNER

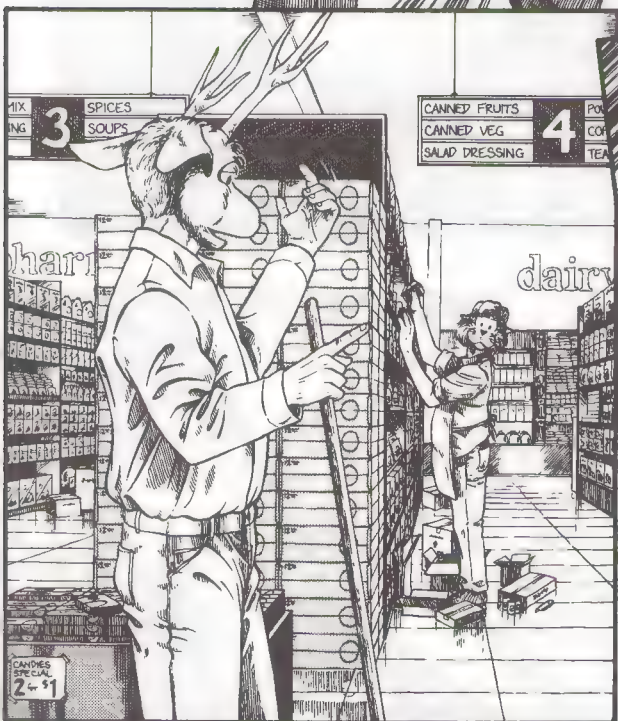


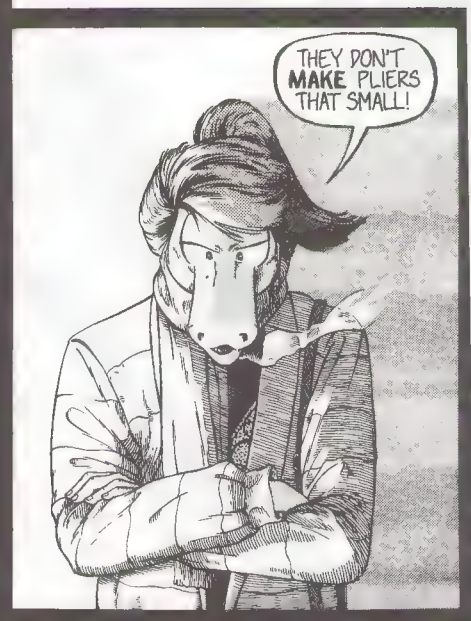












special
GOOD THING: 1/7/99





WELL, GUNTHER! Heh heh—I
GUESS TONIGHT GETS US BOTH NOM-
INATED FOR THE DORKS-OF-THE-YEAR
AWARD!

OH, I
DUNNO,
ARN.

SOMETHING JUST
OCCURED TO ME...

HM...

IF THIS GUY REALLY
IS AN EX-BOYFRIEND OUT
TO MAKE TROUBLE, I'D
THINK THE **FIRST** THING
SHE'D **DO** IS TELL ME...

WOULDN'T YOU?

ARNIE, OL' BUDDY...

I'M ONLY TOO HAPPY
TO GIVE YOU ALL OF THE
FRIENDLY ADVICE THAT
I CAN...

BUT I CAN'T READ
MINDS, BIG GUY.

YEAH, YEAH.
—Heh



IF I WAS SOME OLD LADY,
I'D SLEEP **REAL** TIGHT KNOW-
ING THERE WERE A COUPLE
OF GOOD CITIZENS LIKE YOU
AND ME OUT ON THE STREETS
KEEPING OUR CITY **SAFE!**
Heh heh heh heh—

WHOA!

**WHAT!
WHAT!**

**THE RING!
I ALMOST
FORGOT!**

**YOU STILL HAVE
ERICA'S RING!**

ARN, IF YOU KEEP
OBSESSING ABOUT THIS
YOU'RE GONNA GIVE
YOURSELF ULCERS.

I—ahem—I GUESS I'LL
JUST GET THAT FROM YOU
WHEN I DROP YOU OFF.

SURE, SURE! I
GUESS I'LL GET TO
SHOW YOU THAT PRO-
GRAM AFTER ALL!

**NO! GUNTHER, FOR
GOD'S SAKE! I JUST
HAVE TO PICK UP THE
-RING AND GET HOME!**

ERICA'S **ALL**
BY HERSELF AND—

ARNIE!!

ERICA'S A
BIG GIRL!

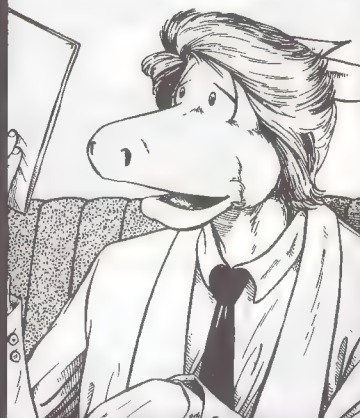
...WELL, I SUPPOSE JUST
THE ONE CUP OF COFFEE
WILL DO FOR RIGHT NOW.

NO CREAM,
PLEASE.

OKAY... I'LL
BRING THAT RIGHT
OUT TO YOU!



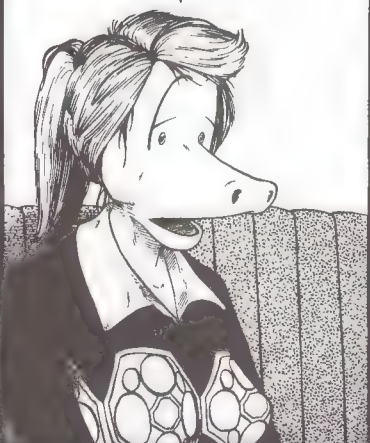
THANKS.



IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND, JUST SAY SO...



HOW'S ANNEKE?

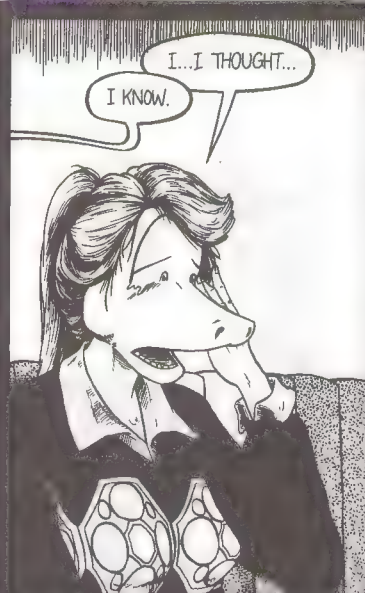


SHE'S FINE.



SHE'S BEAUTIFUL!

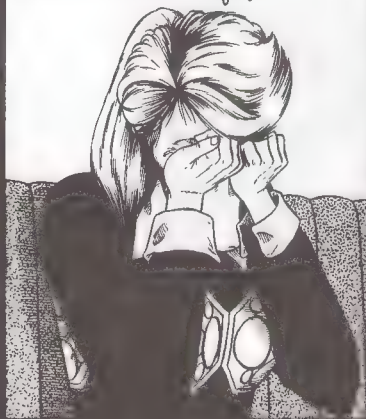




Shhhh — NO
ONE'S ASKING FOR
APOLOGIES HERE.



I THOUGHT WAS
SHE DEAD.



OH! — uh, THANKS!



WELL — ~~sigh~~ — I GUESS
I'D BETTER START AT THE
BEGINNING.



WHEN I GOT HOME THAT AFTERNOON, AND I SAW WHAT HAD HAPPENED—SAW DAD—LYING THERE—SAW THE MESS—I WAS SO SHOCKED I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING AT ALL—

AND FOR THE LONGEST TIME I JUST SAT THERE NEXT TO HIM—LIKE, "THIS ISN'T REAL"—BUT OF COURSE THERE IT WAS.

SO I KNEW I HAD TO CALL THE COPS, BUT I WAS A LITTLE NERVOUS, YOU CAN UNDERSTAND.

I'D BEEN BUSTED ONCE FOR DOPE AND THAT WAS ENOUGH EXPOSURE TO COPS TO LAST ME A LIFETIME! BUT I COULDN'T JUST LEAVE THIS, OBVIOUSLY. WHAT I NEEDED WAS A FEW MINUTES TO GET MY SHIT TOGETHER—

SO I WENT UPSTAIRS—

AND I FOUND ANNEKE IN HER ROOM, IN BED LIKE SHE WAS HAVING A NAP. AND I THOUGHT, "THIS IS WEIRD... HOW CAN SHE BE TAKING A NAP WITH DAD BLOWING HIS BRAINS OUT DOWNSTAIRS?"

SO I WENT TO WAKE HER UP—

AND I SAW THE BLOOD.

AND, *heh*, WELL, THERE I WAS, KA-BOOM! SHOCK NUMBER TWO!

I REMEMBER THINKING, "WHAT IS THIS, SOME MOVIE? HOW CAN MY WHOLE FAMILY BE DEAD? AM I, LIKE, GONNA TURN AROUND AND SEE JASON STANDING THERE?"

BUT WHEN I CHECKED ANNEKE FOR A PULSE, SHE WAS ALIVE! THE PULSE WAS FAINT, BUT IT WAS THERE! I HAULED ASS DOWNSTAIRS TO THE PHONE SO FAST I ALMOST TRIPPED AND BROKE MY STUPID NECK!

THEN I THOUGHT, "HOLY FUCK! WHERE'S KATHRYN?"

I MEAN, IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T LOVE YOU, SIS, BUT MY BRAIN SORT OF FELT LIKE IT HAD BEEN BLOWN UP IN A MICROWAVE, YOU KNOW?

SO AFTER I CALLED 9-1-1 I RAN TO YOUR ROOM, AND IT WAS IMMEDIATELY OBVIOUS, FROM THE WAY ALL YOUR DRAWERS WERE TUMPTED OUT, YOUR STUFF WAS ALL IN A MESS—YOU MUST HAVE BEEN GONE WHEN IT ALL HAPPENED. CAME HOME, TOTALLY FREAKED OUT AND JUST SPLIT. WHO COULD BLAME YOU?

THE COPS CAME. THERE WERE SO MANY FLASHING RED LIGHTS OUR STREET LOOKED LIKE DISNEY WORLD—

DAD'S DEATH WAS RULED SUICIDE.

ANNEKE WAS SENT TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

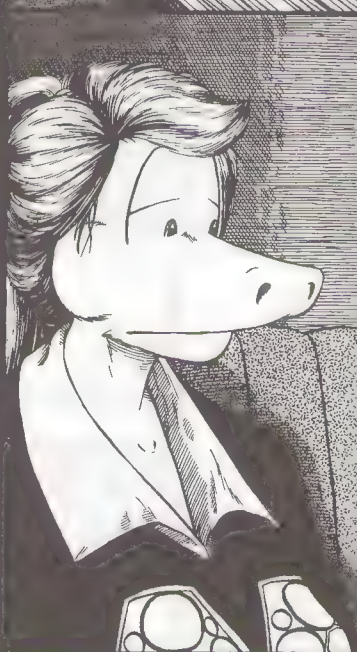
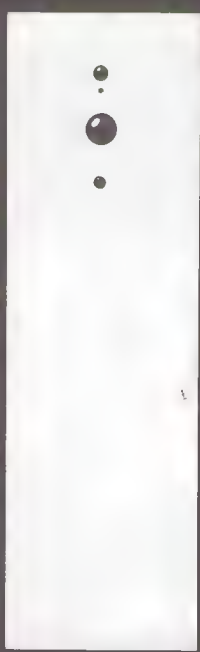
HER VAGINA NEEDED RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY.

THEY GOT WHO-EVER LOOKS FOR RUNAWAYS LOOKING FOR YOU.

UNCLE KARL DROVE DOWN FROM CHARLOTTE

IT ALL MADE THE EVENING NEWS.

I SPENT THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS STONED.

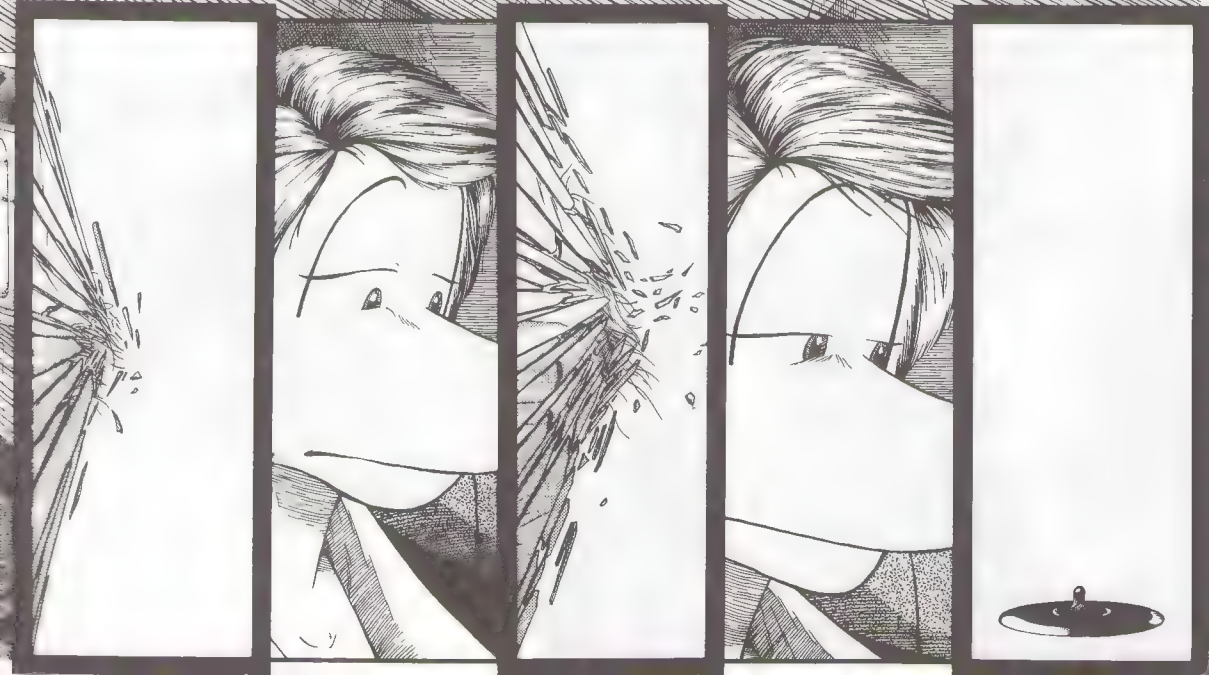




UNCLE KARL WAS CONVINCED
YOU'D GONE TO LIVE WITH MOM,
WHICH I DIDN'T BELIEVE 'COS
I KNEW NO ONE KNEW WHERE
THE HELL SHE WAS. HE WOULD
POINT OUT NO ONE KNEW WHERE
THE HELL **YOU** WERE EITHER
AND SOMEHOW THAT PROVED
IT.

-AND ALL THIS TIME-

-WE'VE BEEN LOOKING.



YOU KNOW, KATHRYN, I DON'T THINK I EVER HAD A DAY WHEN I LIVED IN THAT OLD HOUSE THAT I DIDN'T THINK OF SOME KIND OF REVENGE. I MEAN, WHO **WOULDN'T** RIGHT? WHOEVER MADE UP THIS "HONOR THY FATHER AND MOTHER" NEVER HAD THE **SHIT** BEAT OUT OF 'EM DAY AND NIGHT!

YOU KNOW?

AND I'LL TELL YOU THIS...

I DIDN'T HAVE A SORRY BONE IN MY BODY THEN, AND I SURE AS HELL DON'T **NOW...**

IN FACT, AFTER SEEING ANNEKE, AND READING HIS DAMN **NOTE...**

THE ONLY THING I'M SORRY ABOUT...

IS THE FACT **HE** GOT TO PULL THE TRIGGER...

AND NOT **ME!**

WOW, KEVIN.

THAT'S REALLY MACHO.

I...

I NEVER SAW...

ANY NOTE.

THE NOTE—YOU KNOW—
HIS SUICIDE NOTE! HELL, HE
HAD IT TAPED TO THE FRIDGE!

HE WAS GONNA DO HIMSELF
AND TAKE ALL THREE OF US **WITH**
HIM! SOME KIND OF SICK REVENGE
ON MOM OR SOMETHING! I
MEAN, IS THAT FUCKED UP OR
WHAT?

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SWEET-
WATER'S CRIME OF THE CENTURY!

oh

I MEAN, THE WHOLE THING
WAS BEYOND BELIEF, EVEN FOR
DAD!

YOU REMEMBER THE SLIDING
GLASS DOOR TO THE BACK PATIO,
DON'T YOU? HOW IT WAS BUSTED
IN!?

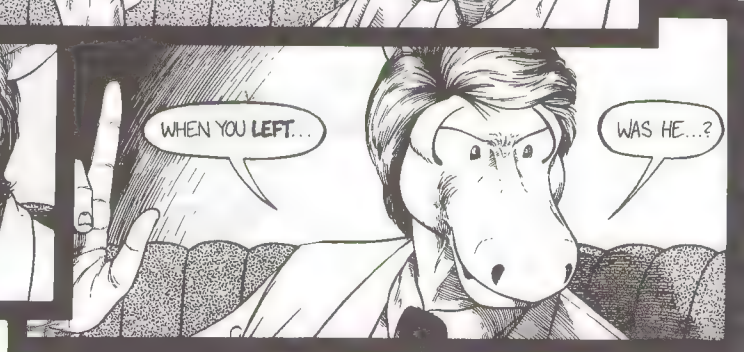
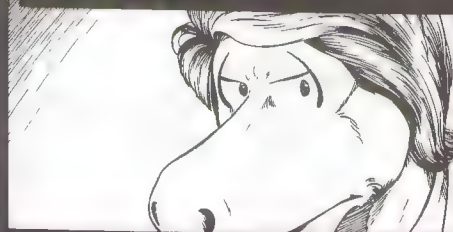
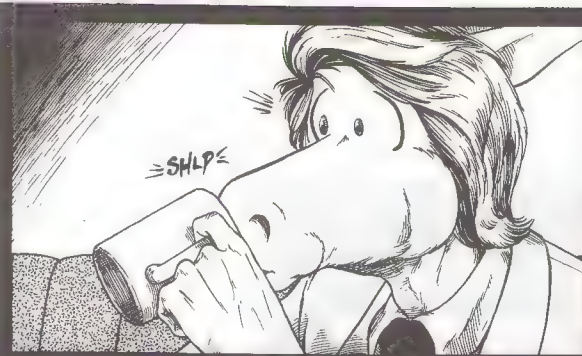
THERE WAS BLOOD ON
THE DEN CARPET.

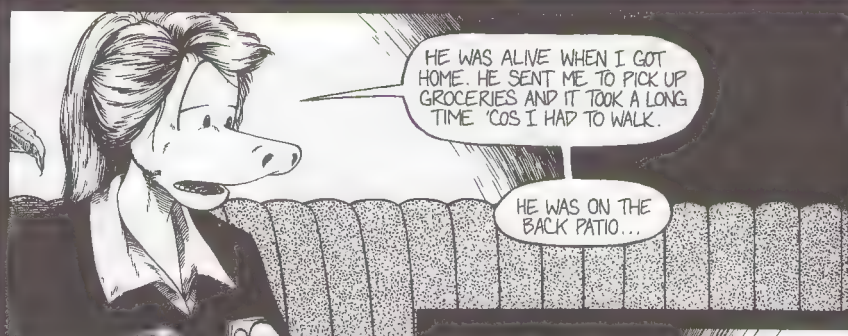
IT LOOKED LIKE ANNEKE
TRIED TO ESCAPE OUT THE
BACK OR SOMETHING AND HE
THREW HER THROUGH THE
FUCKING WINDOW!

No.

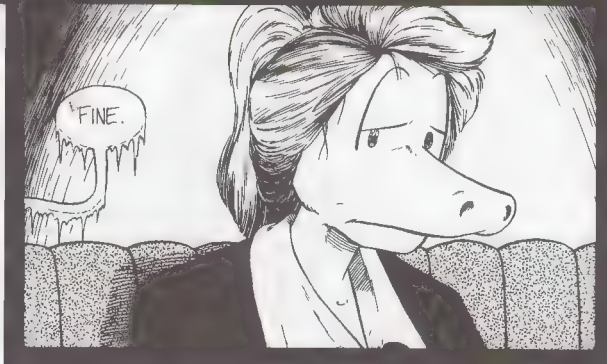
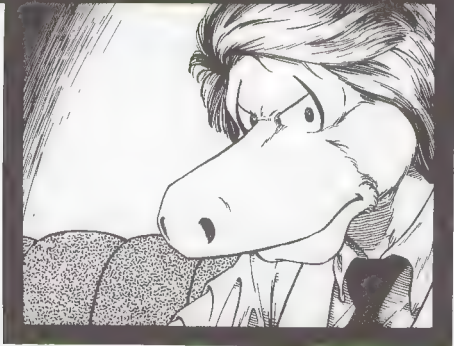
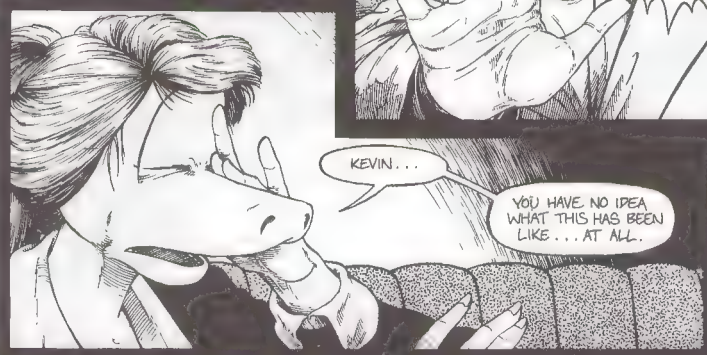
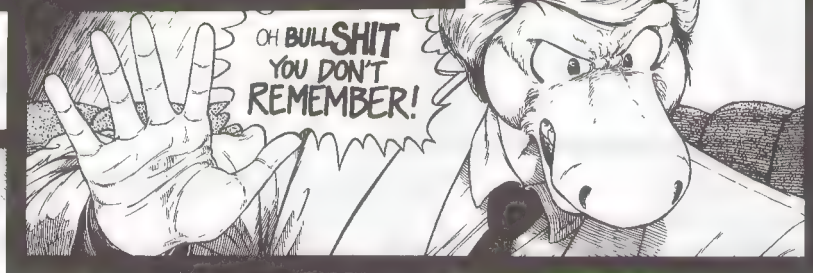
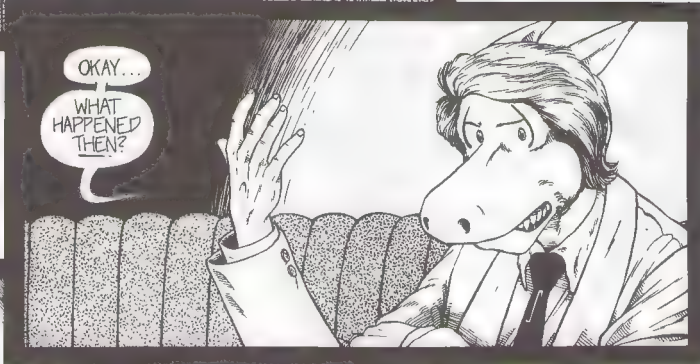
THAT WASN'T ANNEKE.

THAT WAS ME.





HE WAS ON THE BACK PATIO...



IS THAT ALL YOU CAN SAY
TO ME — AFTER ALL THIS
TIME?

AFTER YOU RAN **OFF** — NOT
CALLING ANYONE, NOT THINKING
OF ANYONE BUT
YOURSELF?

I HAVE **NO**
IDEA
?

LISTEN —

SIS

WHEN **YOU'VE** LIVED
WITH THE FALLOUT FROM
THIS FOR FIVE YEARS —

TAKING CARE OF A
PRE-TEENAGE GIRL WHO'S
GOING **SCHIZO...**

SHUNTING HER IN AND
OUT OF **EVERY HOSPITAL**
IN TWO STATES

LIVING WITH HER
FLASHBACKS

THEN —

MAYBE —

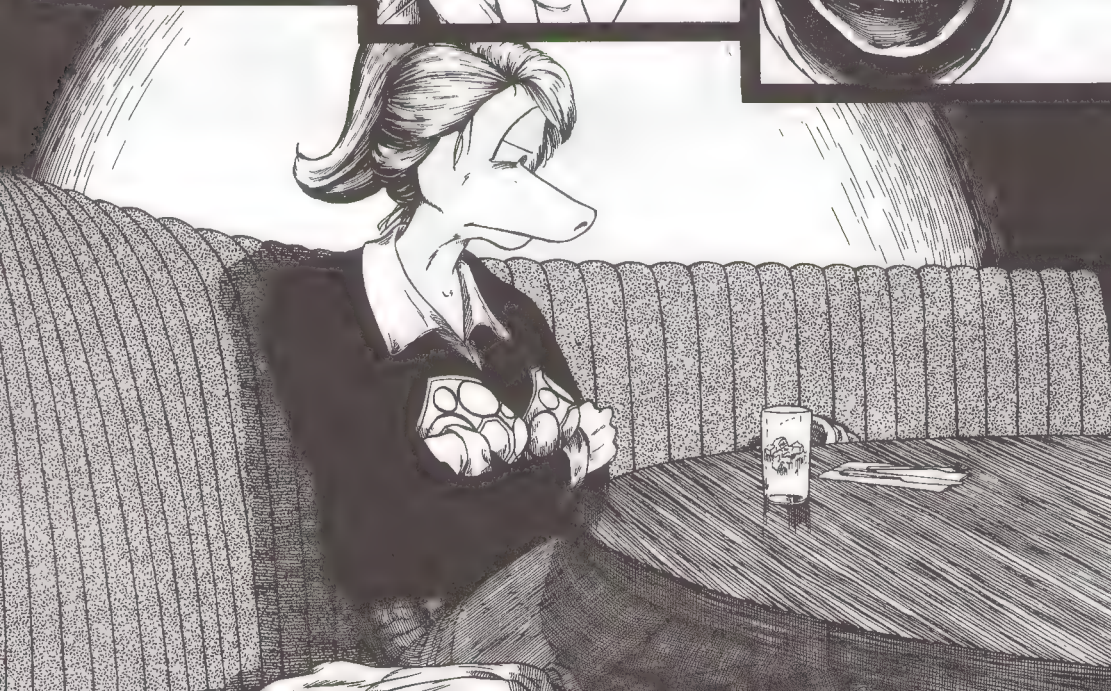
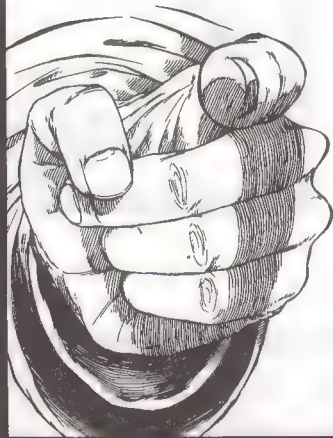
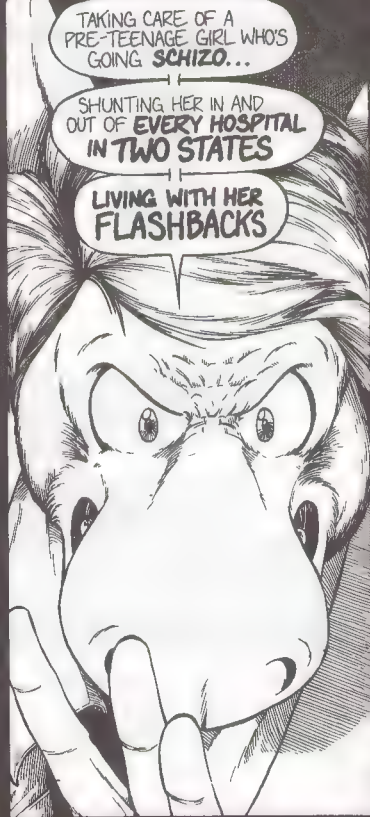
YOU CAN TELL ME —

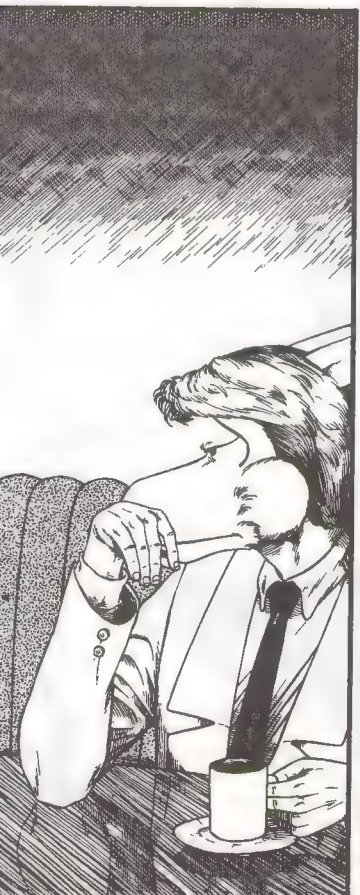
I

HAVE

NO

IDEA.











CHAPTER VIII

Exorcism (prelude)



THIS IS WHERE EVERYTHING GETS WEIRD...



SURE, SURE, IT'S NOT LIKE
THINGS HAVEN'T GOTTEN A
LITTLE WEIRD ALREADY.

... IT'S JUST HARD TO DESCRIBE
HOW MY LIFE STARTED COMING
APART RIGHT AT THIS TIME.

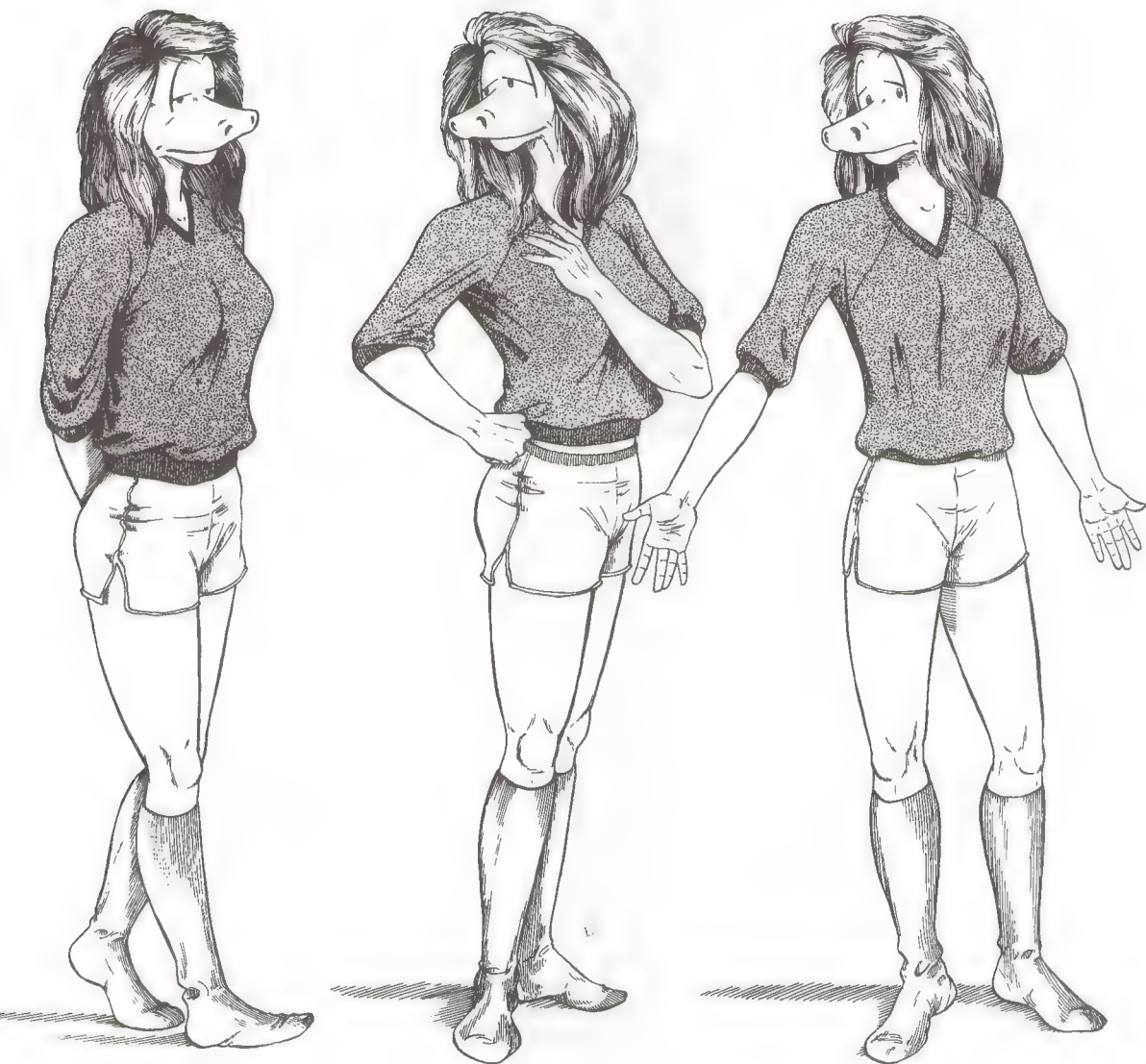
FOR YEARS I HAD GIVEN
MYSELF A NEW LIFE, A NEW
IDENTITY, LIKE AN ACTRESS
TAKING ON A BIG ROLE, YOU
MIGHT SAY. I HAD BECOME
A NEW CHARACTER.

KATHRYN SPENCE SIMPLY
CEASED TO EXIST.

HELLO, ERICA DAVIS.

OF COURSE YOU KNOW,
KATHRYN DIDN'T REALLY
CEASE TO EXIST AT ALL.
I JUST TOLD MYSELF SHE
HAD. NO MATTER HOW MANY
PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIELDS
YOU BUILD UP, ALL THE
BAD MEMORIES AND OTHER
NASTIES NEVER REALLY
GO AWAY...

"...THEY JUST HIDE.



LIKE I READ SOMEWHERE
ONCE THAT IN YOUR BRAIN IS
STORED THE MEMORY OF EACH
AND EVERY SINGLE DAY OF YOUR
LIFE...

EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE
OR SAID... EVERYWHERE YOU'VE
BEEN... EVERYONE YOU'VE
EVER KNOWN AND LOVED...

· IT'S ALL THERE...

IT'S JUST SO MUCH
INFORMATION YOU CAN NEVER
ACCESS IT ALL....

THAT MEANS YOUR BRAIN IS
SORT OF AN ONGOING VIDEOTAPE
OF YOUR LIFE. BUT YOU'LL
NEVER BE ABLE TO PLAY ALL
OF IT BACK—ONLY SECONDS
AT A TIME AT BEST—TINY
CLIPS.

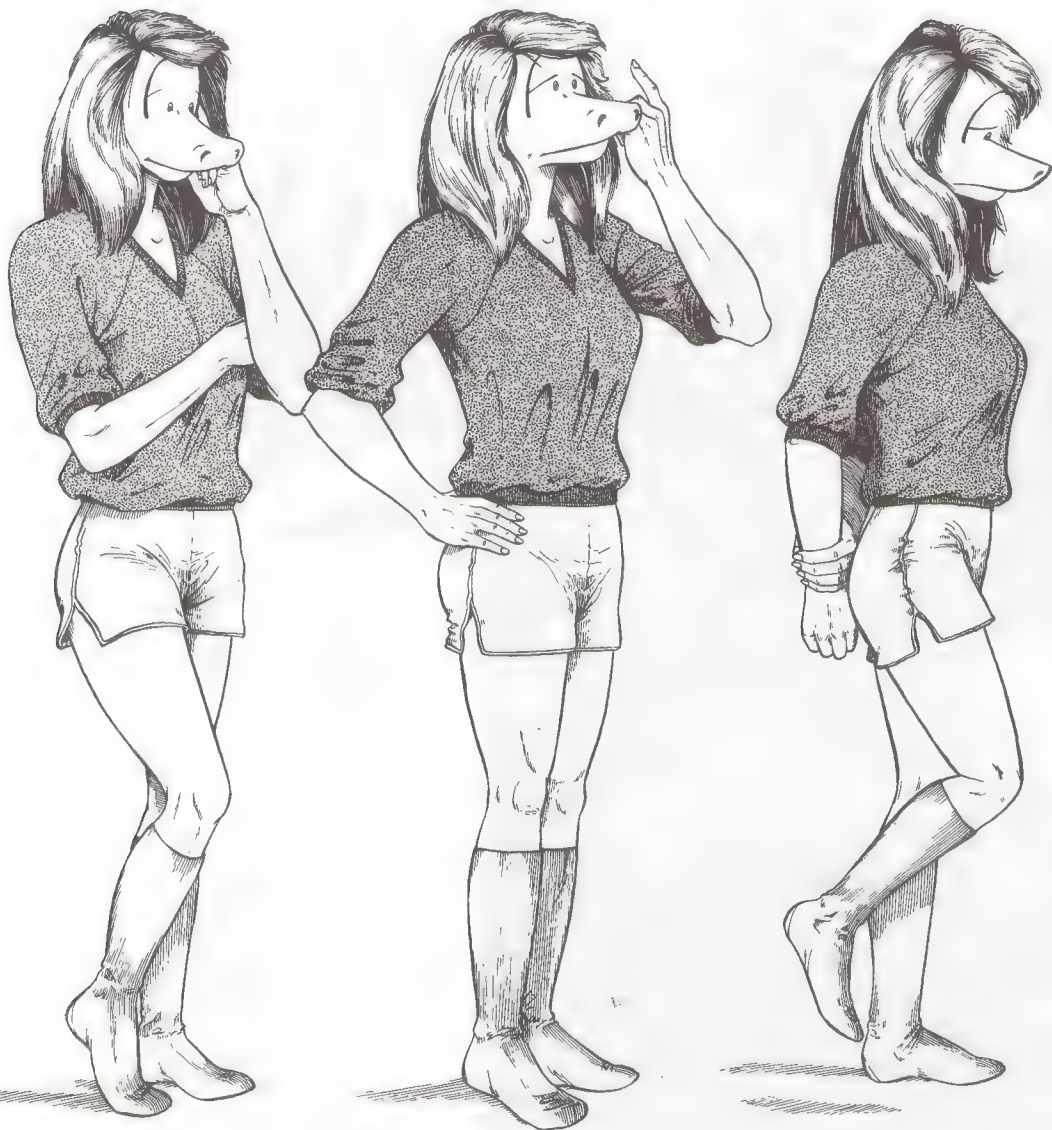
AND WHEN YOU DIE, THE TAPE
IS ERASED.

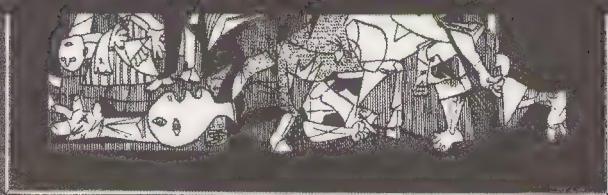
ALL THE IMAGES THAT YOU'VE
STORED AWAY, ALL THOSE MEMORIES...

...SIMPLY VANISH...

..LIKE THEY NEVER EXISTED.

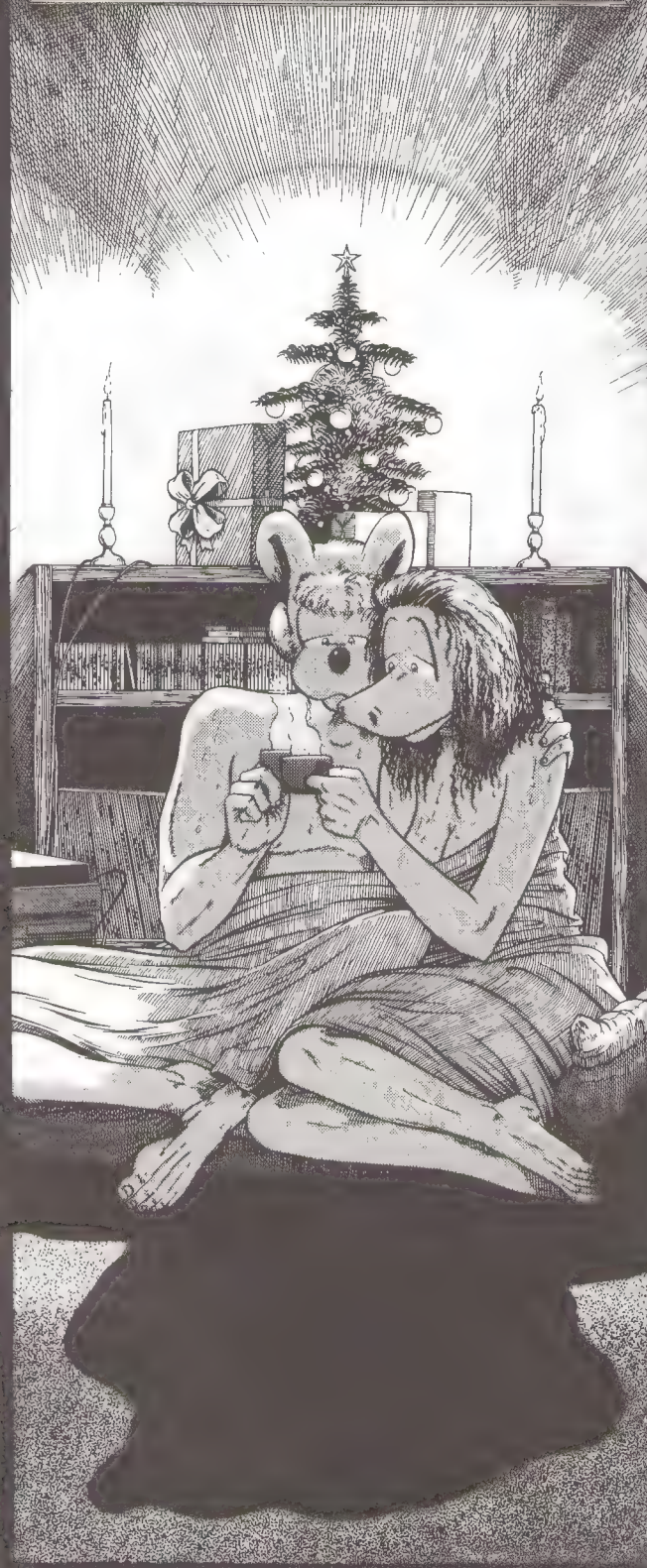
THAT'S SAD.





CHRISTMAS WAS BEAUTIFUL—
I MADE SURE OF THAT.

AFTER KEVIN DROPPED ME BACK
HOME, (ARNIE WAS STILL GONE—I
DIDN'T FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT HE AND
GUNTHER HAD DONE UNTIL THE NEXT
DAY—ARNIE'S SO CUTE, SOMETIMES),
I LAY AWAKE FOR HOURS DOING A
LOT OF THINKING. AND I CAME TO A
DECISION.



...THE NEXT DAY KEVIN AND I FINISHED
OUR CONVERSATION OVER THE PHONE, AND
KEVIN BEGAN HIS LONG DRIVE BACK TO
FLORIDA.

MY DECISION WAS TOTALLY FIRM.

CHRISTMAS WOULD BE JUST
AS ARNIE AND I HAD PLANNED IT.
I HAD A FEELING THAT EVERYTHING
WOULD GO MUCH MORE SMOOTHLY IF
I KEPT TO MY PERVERT-CUSTOMER
STORY, AND CONVINCED ARNIE THE
GUY HAD JUST GIVEN UP.

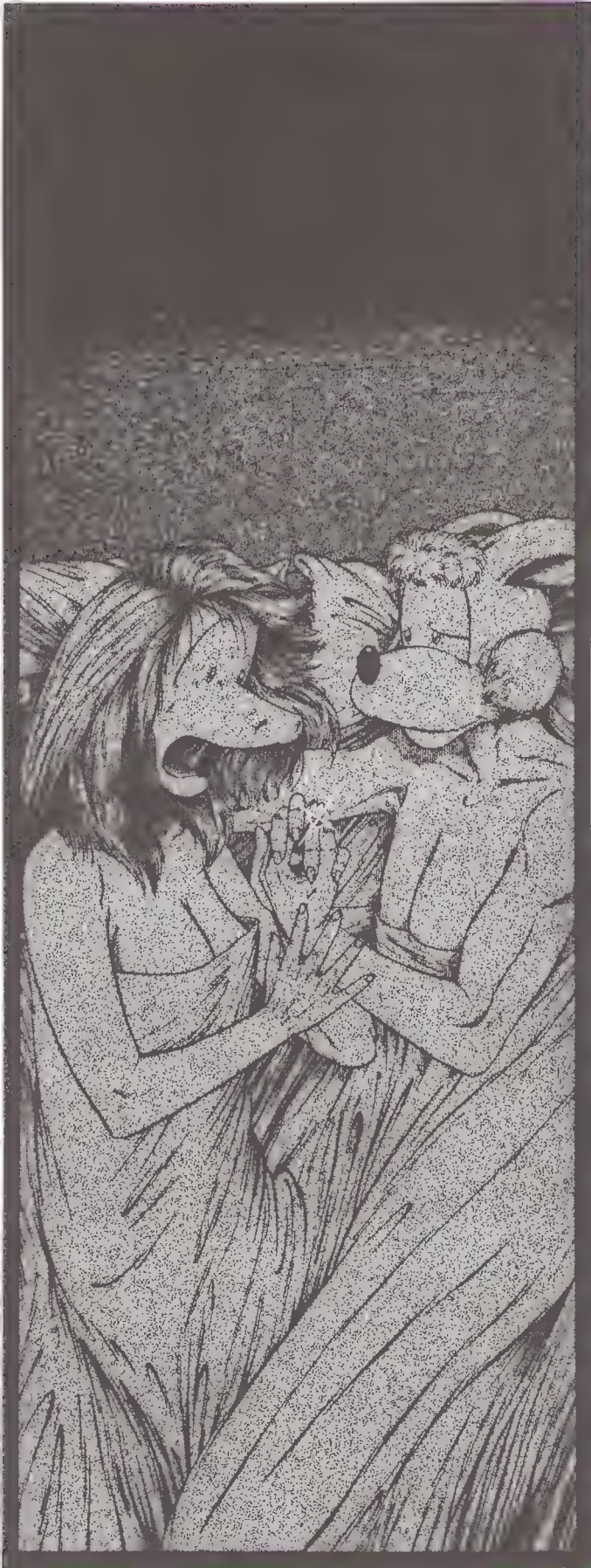
SO BY THE TIME CHRISTMAS EVE ROLLED
AROUND THE DAY AT THE MALL WAS JUST
A MEMORY, AND QUOTE UNQUOTE ERICA
WAS BACK TO HER QUOTE UNQUOTE OLD
SELF.

YEAH...IT WAS A NICE CHRISTMAS!



I WAS **NOT**
EXPECTING THE RING.

I CRIED WHEN HE
GAVE IT TO ME.



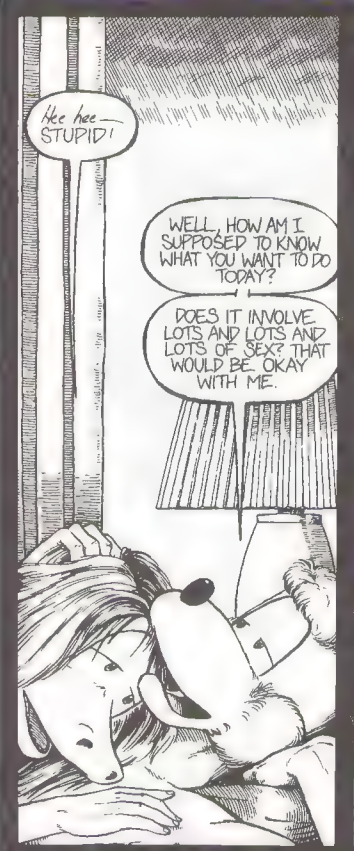
I DON'T THINK HE KNEW WHY.





YOU KNOW WHAT I'D LIKE TO DO TODAY?

UHHH—
GO SKYDIVING IN THE NUDE.



Hee hee—
STUPID!

WELL, HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO DO TODAY?

DOES IT INVOLVE LOTS AND LOTS AND LOTS OF SEX? THAT WOULD BE OKAY WITH ME.



sigh
ARNIE, ARNIE

I THOUGHT AFTER LUNCH WE'D DRIVE DOWN TO JOEY'S PARENTS' LAKEHOUSE.

HUH?!

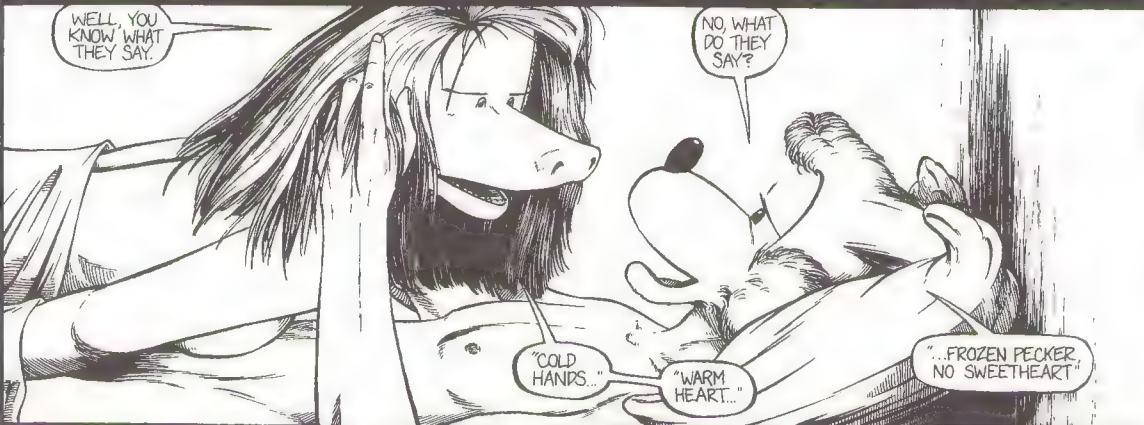
I JUST WANT TO SAY HI, DROP OFF A HAPPY HANNUKAH CARD TO MRS. McLYON...

WELL, WHAT ABOUT OUR QUIET PERSONAL LITTLE CHRISTMAS?



WELL...
...WE CAN JUST CONTINUE IT...
...LATER.

YOW COLD HAND!



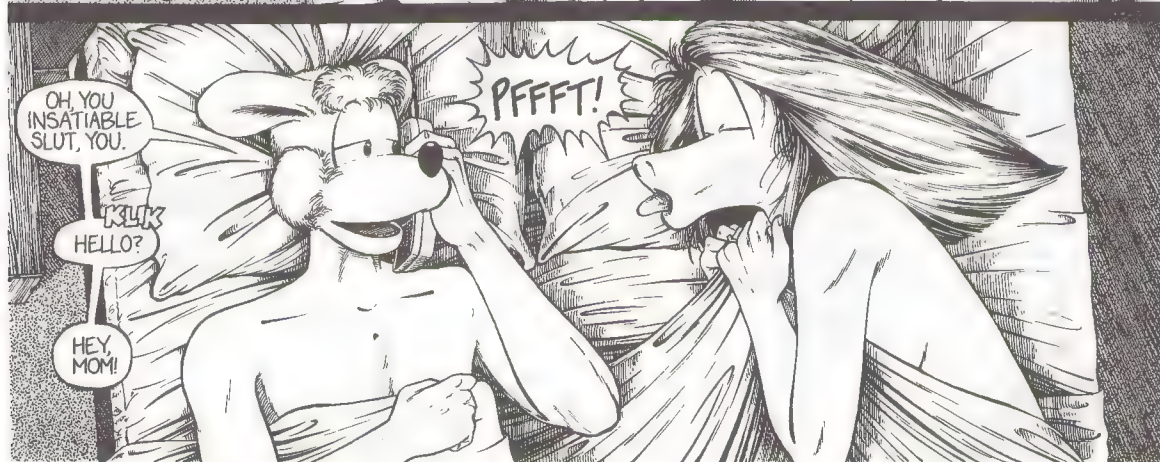
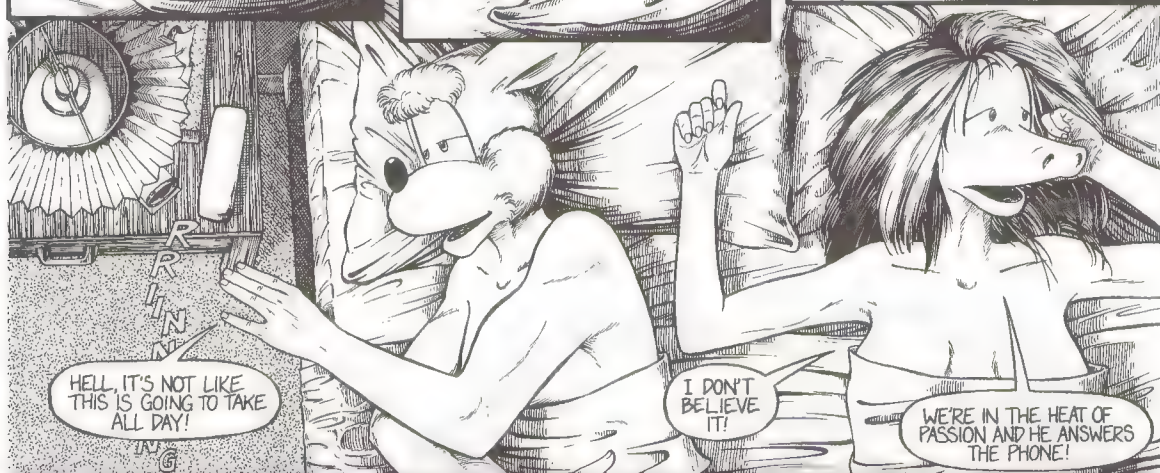
WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY.

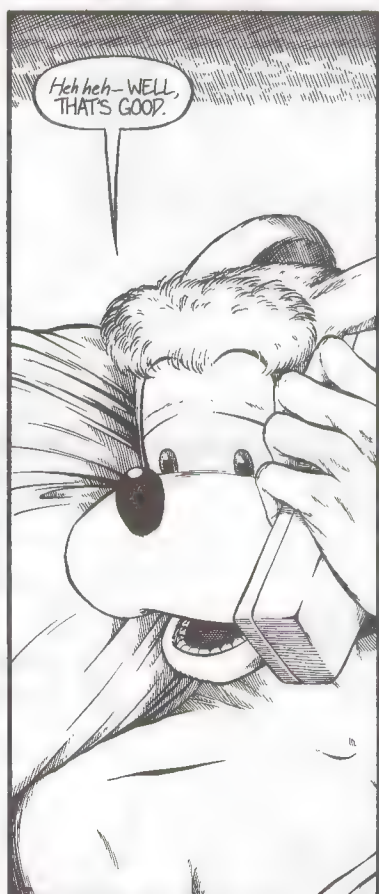
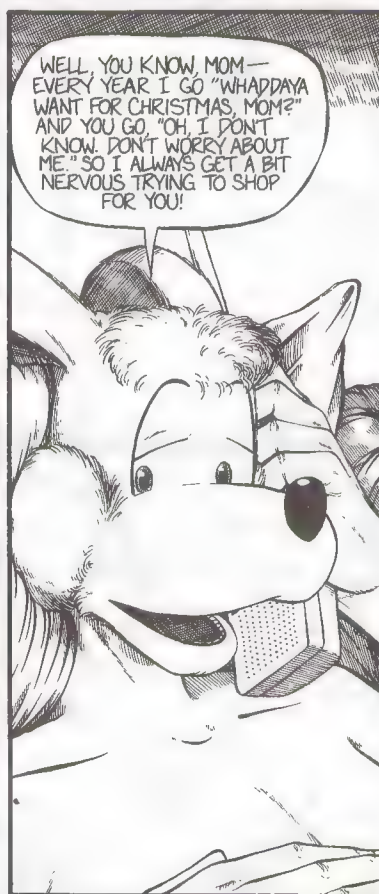
NO, WHAT DO THEY SAY?

"COLD HANDS..."

"WARM HEART..."

"...FROZEN PECKER, NO SWEETHEART."





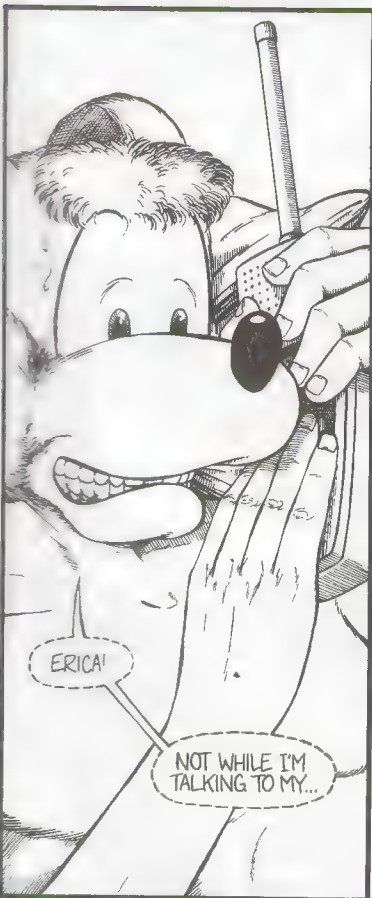
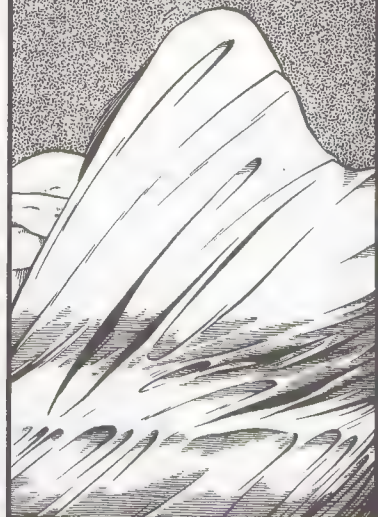
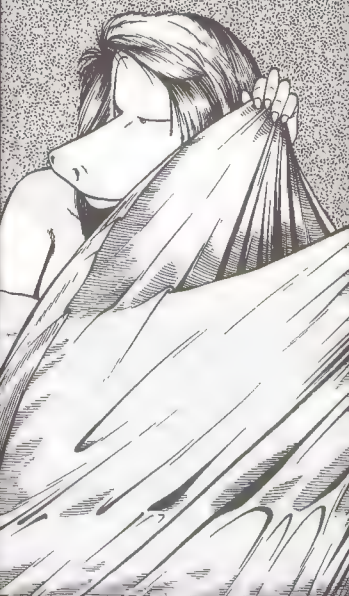
WELL, ERICA WAS SAYING SHE'D LIKE TO HEAD DOWN TO JOEY'S PARENTS' LAKEHOUSE THIS AFTERNOON—YOU KNOW MY FRIEND JOEY?—

ANYWAY, WE'LL PROBABLY DO THAT.

SMK

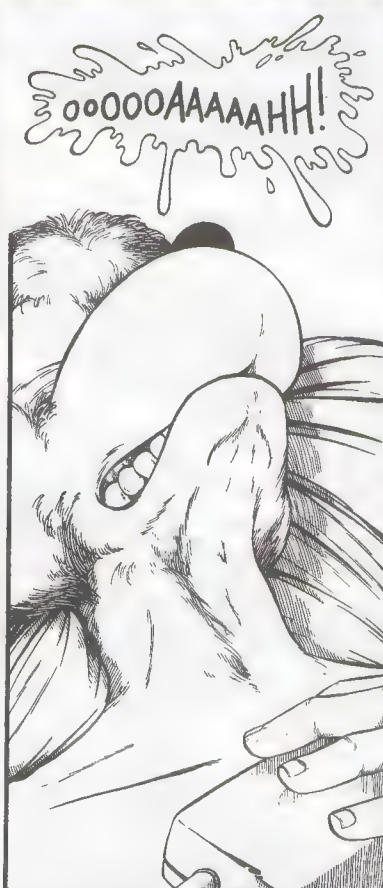
NO, IT'S ONLY LIKE HALF AN HOUR.

YEEES, MOM, I KNOW THERE'S MANIACS ON THE ROADS. I MEET 'EM EVERY DAY... EXCUSE ME A SEC...

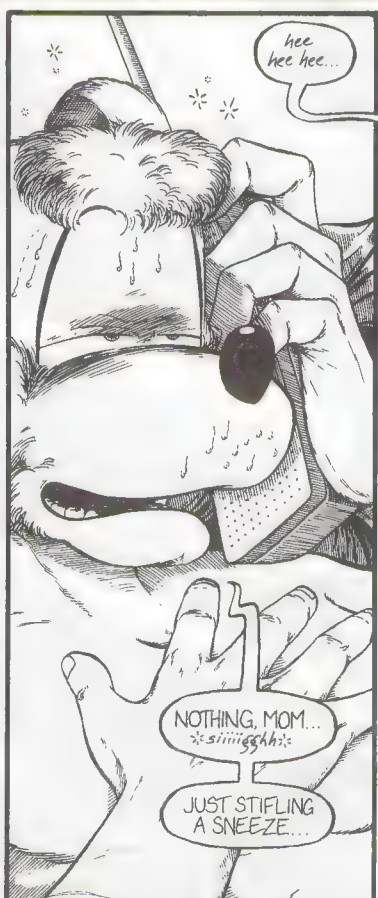


ERICA!

NOT WHILE I'M TALKING TO MY...



OOOOOAAAAHH!



hee hee hee...

NOTHING, MOM...
sneeze

JUST STIFLING
A SNEEZE...

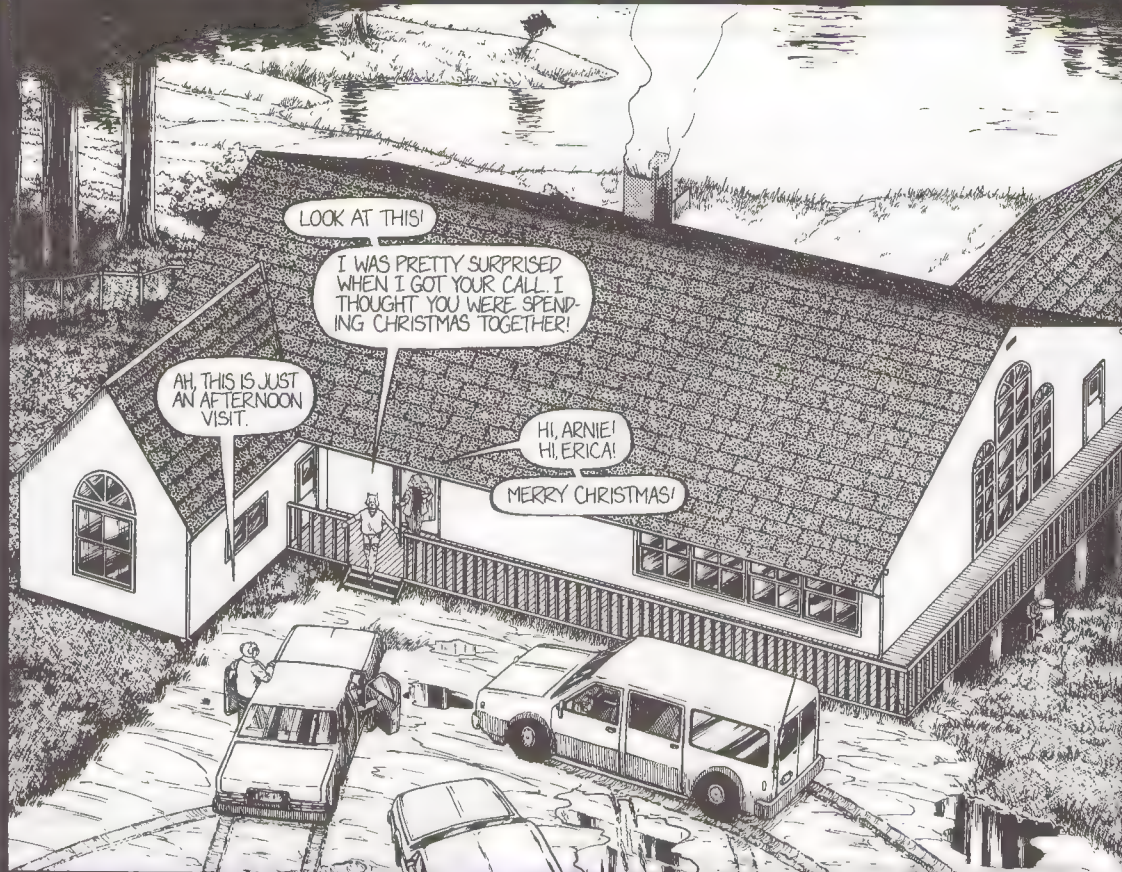
I GUESS IT TAKES A PRETTY SCREWED-UP
PERSON TO BE TOO SCARED TO FACE UP TO
YOUR PROBLEMS **OR** RUN FROM THEM. THE ONLY
THING YOU'RE **NOT** TOO SCARED TO DO IS MAKE
A FOOL OF YOURSELF.

I WANTED TO GO THE
McLYON'S LAKEHOUSE
THAT FRIGID CHRISTMAS
AFTERNOON, I KNOW NOW,
BECAUSE I WANTED MY
DECISION TO FAIL.

I WANTED TO **ATTEMPT**
SUICIDE—**NOT** COMMIT
SUICIDE!

I WANTED TO BE SAVED IN THE ACT

I WAS **THAT** FAR GONE



NICE!

I COULD APPRECIATE
A HOME-AWAY-FROM-HOME
LIKE THIS REAL EASY!

NOW YOU KNOW YOU
TWO ARE WELCOME ANYTIME,
OKAY?

RORY AND GUNTHER
ARE IN THE KITCHEN.
WOULD YOU...



WHAT
BROKE?

NOTHING!

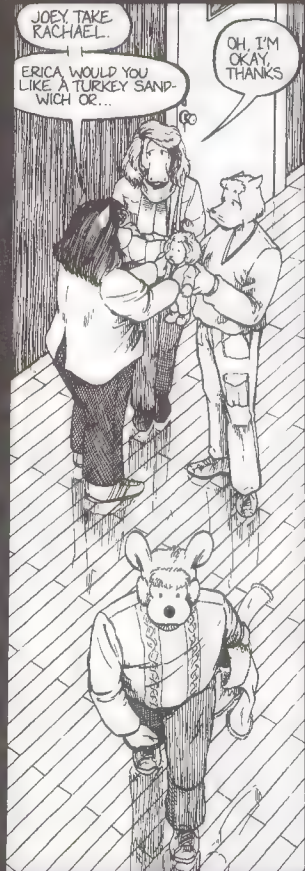
IT'S COOL!

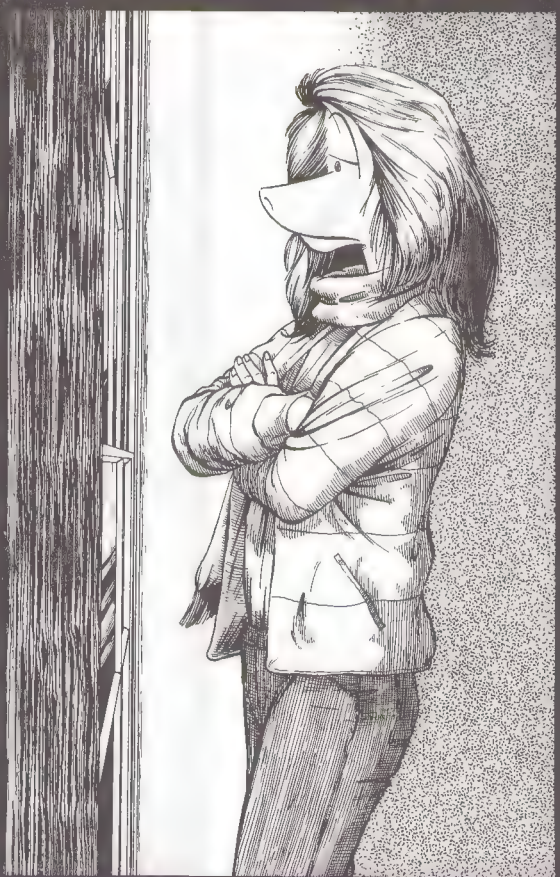
JOEY TAKE
RACHAEL.

ERICA WOULD YOU
LIKE A TURKEY SAND-
WICH OR...

OH, I'M
OKAY, THANKS

KA-
BANGA
PANK
!







I MUST HAVE STARED AT THAT
LAKE FOR THIRTY MINUTES....

WHEN THE TIME FINALLY CAME
TO "DO IT"—CAPITAL D CAPITAL
I—THE WHOLE THING WAS ODDLY
—I DON'T KNOW—

UNEMOTIONAL?

I FELT DISTANT—ALOOF—

YOU KNOW—
"NOTHING MATTERS."

I SIMPLY WALKED OUT THE
BACK DOOR WITHOUT A WORD,
DOWN THE STEPS AND OUT TO
THE McLYONS' BOAT
DOCK.

NO TEARS. NO BACKWARD
GLANCE.

NOTHING.



I WONDER IF THAT'S
HOW THEY DO IT ON
DEATH ROW?



SHIT, THIS IS GETTING MORBID.

ACTUALLY, I THOUGHT OF TWO THINGS AS I SAT ON THAT HARD WOODEN RAILING, TOOK OFF MY COAT AND BEGAN UNLACING MY BOOTS. (REMEMBER—THIS IS 20/20 HIND-SIGHT TALKING. AT THE TIME I WAS ABOUT 40% CONVINCED I WAS CHECKING OUT.)

I THOUGHT OF ANNEKE—HOW I RAN OFF, LEAVING HER BEHIND LEAVING HER TO PICK UP HER OWN PIECES. AND I BASKED IN SELF-PITY, WHICH IS, I SUPPOSE, GOOD TO DO IF YOU'RE PLANNING TO OFF YOURSELF.

I THOUGHT OF ARNIE.

I THOUGHT OF ARNIE, AND THE NIGHT BEFORE—OUR LAST NIGHT TOGETHER.

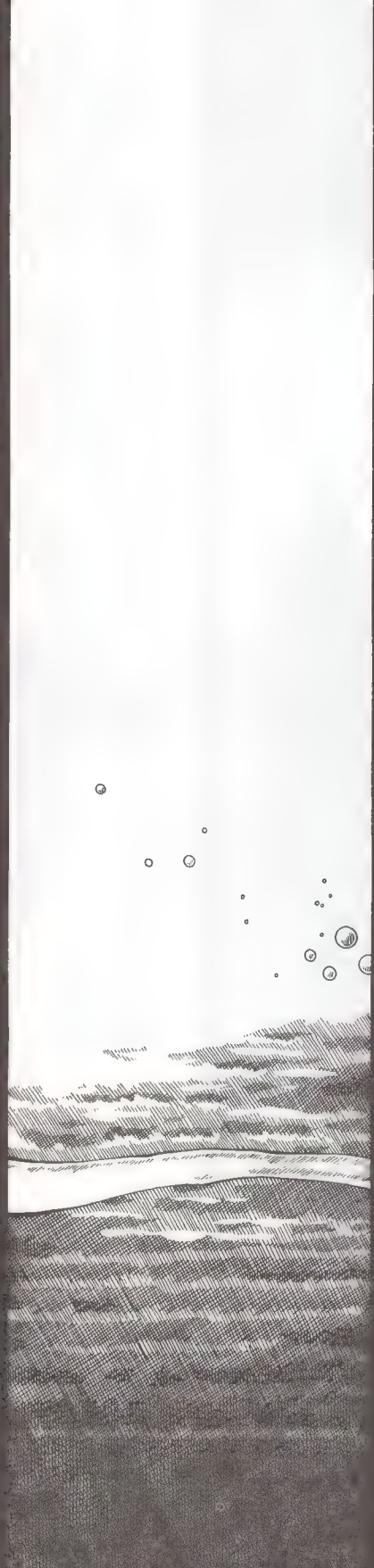
SOMETHING SCREAMED "STOP" FROM...SOMEPLACE. I COULD STAY HAPPY. I COULD KEEP THE ACT GOING. BE ERICA, MARRY ARNIE, DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY.

I THOUGHT OF ARNIE AS I TIED MY ANKLES.



HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TRANSPIRED
INSIDE THE HOUSE AT THE MOMENT
I JUMPED...

MY MIND CONJURES
SCENARIO OR TWO.

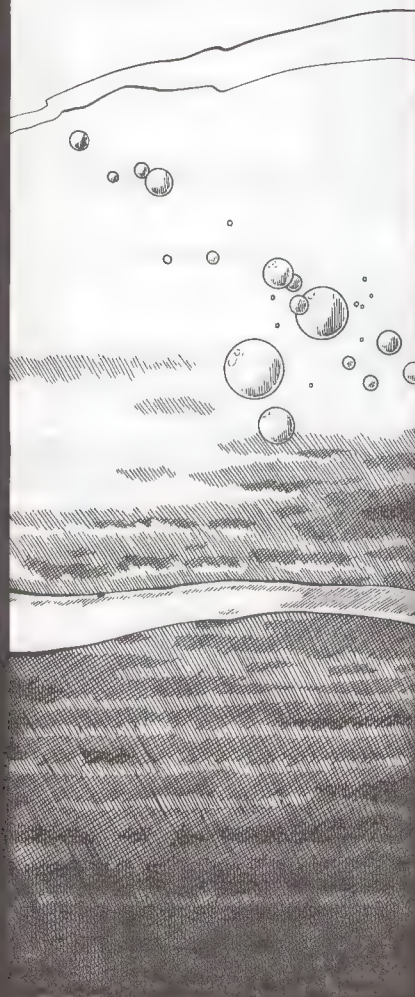


PERHAPS ARNIE HAS
NOTICED I'VE BECOME
MOODY AND QUIET AGAIN

HE WONDER'S IF HE SHOULD
MENTION ANYTHING. HEY, BOTH
OF JOEY'S PARENTS HAVE DONE
SOCIAL WORK—MRS. MEYON IS
A TOP-DOLLAR DIVORCE
COUNSELOR. FOR GOD'S SAKE!

HE STARES DOWN AT ME
FROM THE HOUSE... THERE'S
BOTH CURIOSITY AND WORRY
ON HIS FACE.

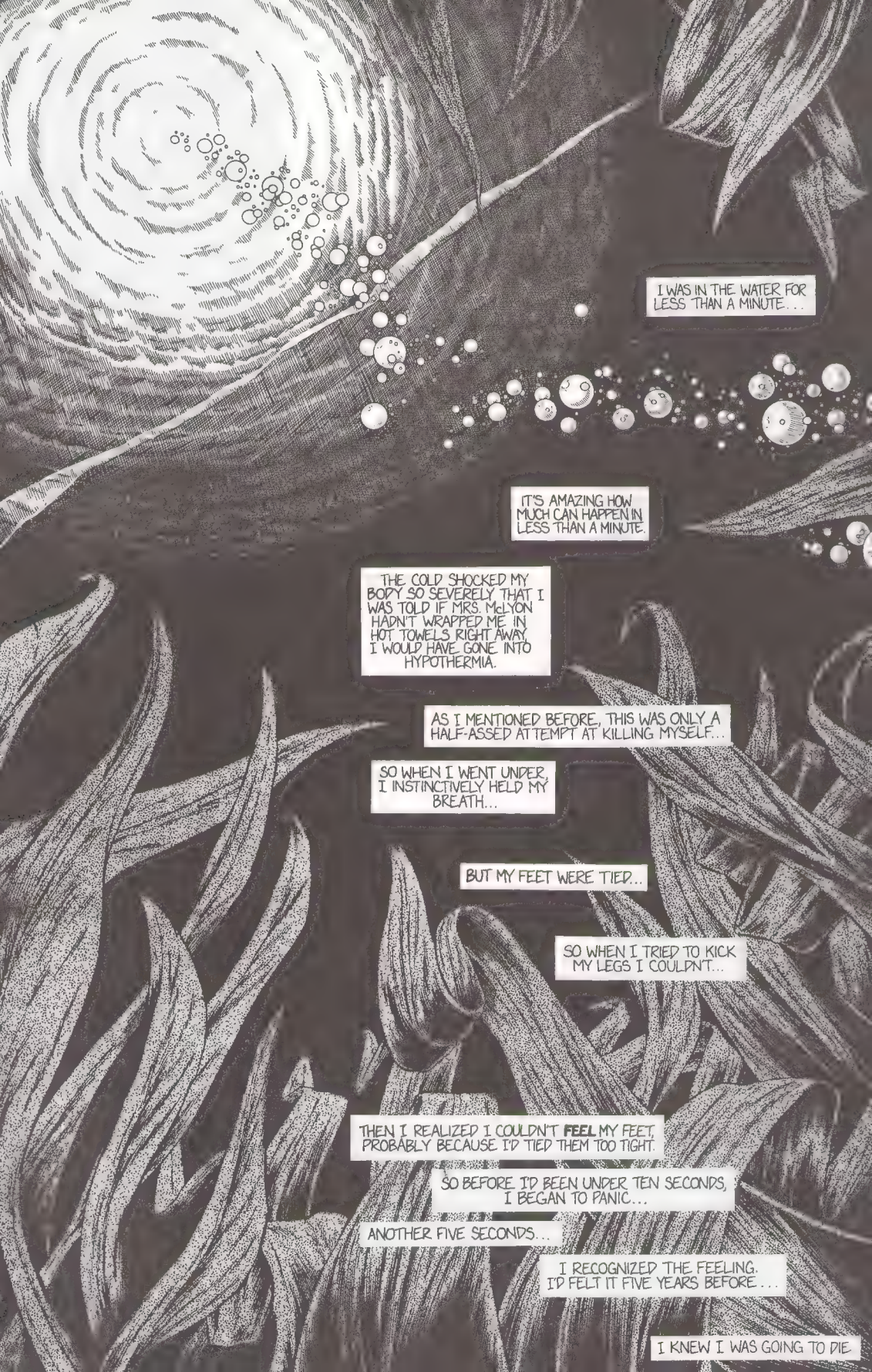
THEN HE SEES ME
FALL IN



PERHAPS SOMEONE SAYS
SOMETHING... ASKS HIM A
QUESTION... HE TURNS FROM
THE WINDOW BRIEFLY...

OR PERHAPS NOT

AND WHEN HE TURNS BACK—



I WAS IN THE WATER FOR
LESS THAN A MINUTE...

IT'S AMAZING HOW
MUCH CAN HAPPEN IN
LESS THAN A MINUTE.

THE COLD SHOCKED MY
BODY SO SEVERELY THAT I
WAS TOLD IF MRS. McLYON
HADN'T WRAPPED ME IN
HOT TOWELS RIGHT AWAY
I WOULD HAVE GONE INTO
HYPOTHERMIA.

AS I MENTIONED BEFORE, THIS WAS ONLY A
HALF-ASSED ATTEMPT AT KILLING MYSELF...

SO WHEN I WENT UNDER,
I INSTINCTIVELY HELD MY
BREATH...

BUT MY FEET WERE TIED...

SO WHEN I TRIED TO KICK
MY LEGS I COULDN'T...


THEN I REALIZED I COULDN'T **FEEL** MY FEET,
PROBABLY BECAUSE I'D TIED THEM TOO TIGHT.

SO BEFORE I'D BEEN UNDER TEN SECONDS,
I BEGAN TO PANIC...

ANOTHER FIVE SECONDS...

I RECOGNIZED THE FEELING.
I'D FELT IT FIVE YEARS BEFORE...

I KNEW I WAS GOING TO DIE



THE LAST THING I CONSCIOUSLY REMEMBER DOING IS GRASPING AT THE SHOELACES AROUND MY NUMB ANKLES, LACES TOO SOAKED TO BE UNTIED BY NOW (GUNTHER HAD TO CUT THEM WITH HIS POCKET-KNIFE).

THEN IT HAPPENED

MY LUNGS—WHICH HAD BEEN THREATENING TO GO OFF LIKE TWO BOMBS—WENT OFF LIKE TWO BOMBS...

...THE PRECIOUS AIR ESCAPING IN A BLAST OF PURE, WHITE PAIN.

AND THAT WAS THE END OF ERICA.

IT WAS KATHRYN THEY PULLED OUT OF THAT FROZEN MURK... KATHRYN WHO HACKED UP A HALF-PINT OF WATER ON THE McLYON'S DOCK...

KATHRYN WHO WAS FLOWN BY HELICOPTER TO THE HOSPITAL WITH A WARM I.V. IN HER ARM...

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO RIDE IN A HELICOPTER...

LOOKING BACK ON THIS, I THINK TO MYSELF "THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A MILLION MORE SENSIBLE THINGS I COULD'VE DONE."

AND IT'S TRUE.

BUT IT'S ALSO TRUE THAT IN SITUATIONS LIKE THIS, SENSE GOES OUT THE WINDOW...

REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING MY FRIEND ADRIAN IN NEW ORLEANS ONCE SAID...

...ABOUT BEING SNOWBLIND...

...HE'D HAVE TO EXPLAIN...


ANYWAY, THE MIDDLE OF MY STORY IS NOW COMPLETE.

NOW IT'S TIME TO GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING...

I DON'T WANT TO...

BUT A STORY'S GOT TO HAVE A BEGINNING.

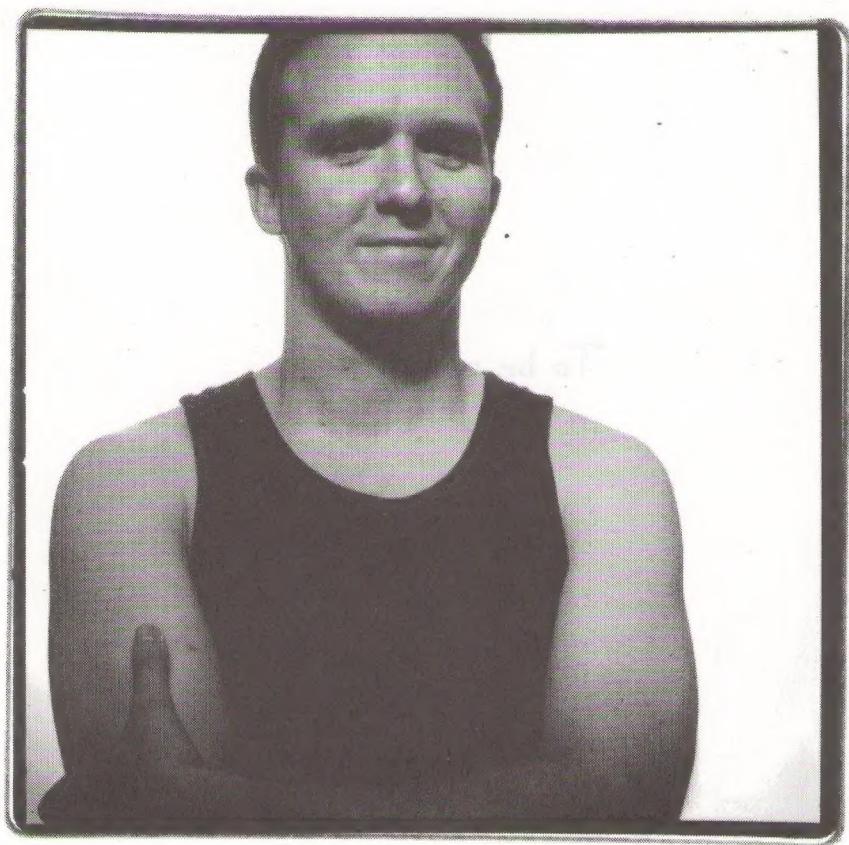
EVEN IF IT'S THE HARDEST PART.



To be continued...

These figures were taken in 1910 and were taken
during the first and last of the century.
They are taken from the first and last of the
century in a series of photographs taken in
the century.

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Martin Wagner was born in 1966 and grew up in England, the Middle East and Singapore. He currently lives in Austin, Texas, where he releases new issues of *Hepcats* on a schedule slightly faster than that of *Big Numbers*.

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